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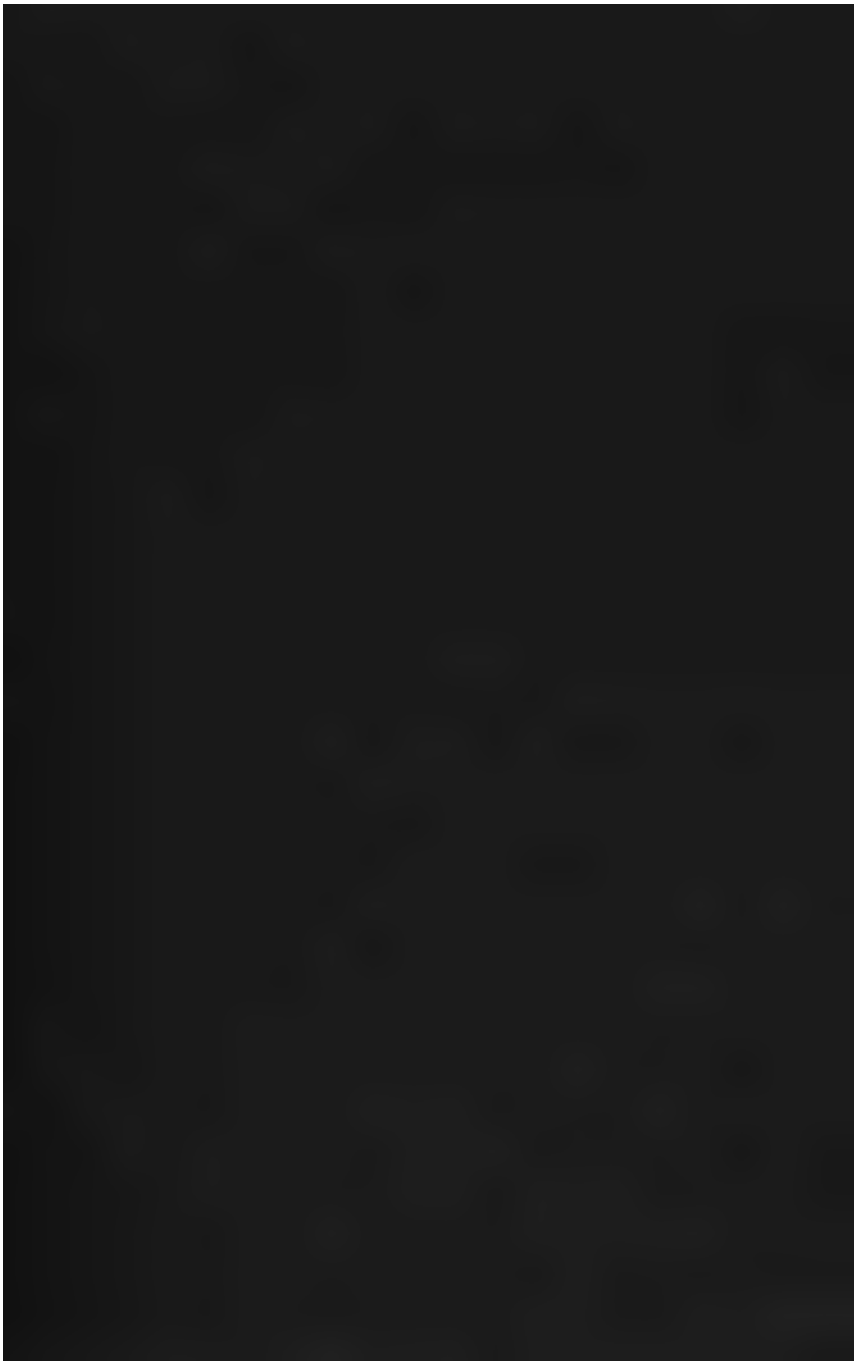

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THE THREE BRIDES.

THE

THREE BRIDES.

BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE,

AUTHOR OF "THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE," &C.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOLUME II.

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THE THREE BRIDES.

CHAPTER I.

AWFULLY JOLLY.

"When life becomes a spasm,
And history a whiz,
If that is not sensation,
I don't know what it is."

Lewis Carroll.

"Is Lady Rosamond at home?"

"No, ma'am."

"Nor Mrs. Charnock?"

"No, ma'am; they are both gone down to the Rectory."

"Would you ask whether Mrs. Poynsett would like to see me?"

"I'll inquire, ma'am, if you will walk in," said Mr. Jenkins, moved by the wearied and heated looks of Miss Vivian, who had evidently come on foot at the unseasonable visiting hour of 11.15 A.M.

The drawing-room was empty, but, with windows open on the shady side, was most inviting to one who

had just become unpleasantly aware that her walking capacity had diminished under the stress of a London season, and that a very hampering one. She was glad of the rest, but it lasted long enough to be lost in the uncomfortable consciousness that hers was too truly a morning call, and she would have risen and escaped had not that been worse.

At last the door of communication opened, and to her amazement Mrs. Poynsett was pushed into the room by her maid in a wheeled chair. "Yes, my dear," she said, in reply to Eleonora's exclamation of surprise and congratulation, "this is my dear daughters' achievement; Rosamond planned and Anne contrived, and they both coaxed my lazy bones."

"I am so very glad! I had no notion I should see you out of your room."

"Such is one's self-importance! I thought the fame would have reached you at least."

"Ah, you don't know how little I see of anyone I can hear from! And now I am afraid I have disturbed you too early."

"Oh no, my dear; it was very good and kind, and I am only grieved that you had so long to wait; but we will make the most of each other now. You will stay to luncheon?"

"Thank you, indeed I am afraid I must not: papa would not like it, for no one knows where I am."

"You have taken this long walk in the heat, and

are going back! I don't like it, my dear; you look fagged. London has not agreed with you."

Mrs. Poynsett rang her little hand-bell, and ordered in biscuits and wine, and would have ordered the carriage but for Lenore's urgent entreaties to the contrary, amounting to an admission that she wished her visit to be unnoticed at home. This was hardly settled before there was a knock at the door, announcing the baby's daily visit; and Miss Julia was exhibited by her grandmamma with great satisfaction until another interruption came, in a call from the doctor, who only looked in occasionally, and had fallen on this unfortunate morning.

"Most unlucky," said Mrs. Poynsett. "I am afraid you will doubt about coming again, and I have not had one word about our Frankie."

"He is very well. I saw him at a party the night before we left town. Good-bye, dear Mrs. Poynsett."

"You will come again?"

"If I can; but the house is to be full of visitors. If I don't, you will know it is because I can't."

"I shall be thankful for whatever you can give me. I wish I could save you that hot walk in the sun."

But as Mrs. Poynsett was wheeled into her own room some compensation befell Eleonora, for she met Julius in the hall, and he offered to drive her to the gates of Sirenwood in what he called "our new plaything, the pony carriage," on his way to a clerical meeting.

"You are still here?" she said.

"Till Tuesday, when we go to the Rectory to receive the two De Lancey boys for the holidays."

"How Mrs. Poynsett will miss you."

"Anne is a very efficient companion," said Julius, speaking to her like one of the family; "the pity is that she will be so entirely lost to us when Miles claims her."

"Then they still mean to settle in Africa?"

"Her heart has always been there, and her father is in treaty for a farm for him, so I fear there is little hope of keeping them. I can't think what the parish will do without her. By the bye, how does Joe Reynolds get on with his drawings?"

"I must show them to you. He is really very clever. We sent him to the School of Art twice a week, and he has got on wonderfully. I begin to believe in my academician."

"So you don't repent?"

"I think not. As far as I can judge he is a good boy still. I make him my escort to church, so that I am sure of him there. Renville would have taken him for a boy about his studio, and I think he will go there eventually; but Camilla thinks he may be an attraction at the bazaar, and is making him draw for it."

"I was in hopes that the bazaar would have blown over, but the Bishop has been demanding of Fuller and his churchwardens how soon they mean to put

the building in hand, and this seems to be their only notion of raising money."

"I am very glad of this opportunity of asking what you think I had better do about it. Your wife takes no part in it?"

"Certainly not; but I doubt whether that need be a precedent for you. I am answerable for her, and you could hardly keep out of it without making a divided household."

"I see the difference, and perhaps I have made myself quite unpleasant enough already."

"As the opposition?"

"And Camilla has been very kind in giving me much more freedom than I expected, and pacifying papa. She let me go every Friday evening to help Lady Susan Strangeways at her mothers' meeting."

"Lady Susan Strangeways! I have heard of her."

"She has been my comforter and help all this time. She is all kindness and heartiness,—elbow-deep in everything good. She got up at five o'clock to finish the decorations at St. Maurice's, and to-day she is taking five hundred school children to Windsor forest."

"Is she the mother of the young man at Backsworth?"

"Yes," said Eleonora, in rather a different tone. "Perhaps she goes rather far; and he has flown into the opposite extreme, though they say he is improving, and has given up the Turf, and all that sort of thing."

"Was he at home? I heard he was on leave."

"He was said to be at home, but I hardly ever saw him. He was always out with his own friends when I was there."

"I should not suppose Lady Susan's pursuits were much in his line. Is not one of the daughters a Sister?"

"Yes, at St. Faith's. She was my great friend. The younger ones are nice girls, but have not much in them. Camilla is going to have them down for the bazaar."

"What, do they patronize bazaars?"

"Everything that is *doing* they patronize. I have known them be everywhere, from the Drawing-room to a Guild-meeting in a back slum, and all with equal appetite. That is one reason why I fear I shall not see much of your mother; they are never tired, and I shall never get out alone. The house is to be full of people, and we are to be very gay."

She spoke with a tone that betrayed how little pleasure she expected, though it strove to be uncomplaining; and Julius, who had learnt something of poor Frank's state of jealous misery, heartily wished the Strangeways family further, regarding the intimacy as a manœuvre of Lady Tyrrell's, and doubting how far all Eleonora's evident struggles would keep her out of the net; and though while talking to her he had not the slightest doubt of her sincerity, he had not long set her down at the lodge before he remembered that she was a Vivian.

Meantime Rosamond, carrying some medicament to old Betty Reynolds, found the whole clan in excitement at the appearance of Joe in all his buttons, looking quite as honest and innocent, though a good deal more civilised, than when he was first discovered among the swine.

"Only to think," said his great-grandmother, "that up in London all they could gie to he was a bad penny."

"It is the bronze medal, my lady," said Joshua, with a blush; "the second prize for crayons in our section."

"Indeed," cried Rosamond. "You are a genius, Joe, worthy of your namesake. There are many that would be proud to have the grandson you have, Betty."

"Tubby sure," added an aunt-in-law, "'tis cheap come by. Such things to make a young lad draught. They ought to be ashamed of themselves, they did oughter. Shut it up, Josh; don't be showing it to the lady—'tis nothing but the bare back of a sweep."

"My Lady and Miss Vivian have seen it," said Joshua, blushing. "'Tis torso, my Lady, from a cast from the museum."

"A black-looking draught," repeated the grandmother. "I tells Joe, if he drawed like King Geaarge's head up at Wilsbro' on the sign, with cheeks like apples, and a gould crown a-top, he'd arn his bread."

"All in good time, Betty. He can't colour till he can draw. I'm glad to see him looking so well."

"Yes, my Lady, he do have his health torrablish, though he lives in a underground sort of a place; and they fine servants puts upon he shameful."

"Granny!" muttered Joshua, in expostulation.

"He's a brave boy, and does not mind roughing it, so he can get on," said Rosamond.

"And the ladies are very good to me," said the boy.

"Show Lady Rosamond the draught you did of Miss Vivian, like a hangel," suggested the aunt.

The rising artist coloured, saying, "Please, my Lady, don't name it to no one. I would not have shown it, but little Bess, she pulled down all my things on the floor when I was not looking. It is from memory, my Lady, as she looks when she's doing anything for Sir Harry."

It was a very lovely sketch—imperfect, but full of genius, and wonderfully catching the tender, wistful look which was often on Eleonora's face as she waited on her father. Rosamond longed that Frank should see it; but the page was very shy about it, and his grandmother contrasted it with the performances of the painter "who had draughted all the farmers' wives in gould frames for five pound a head; but satin gownds and gould chains was extry."

But Joe had brought her a pound of tea, and an "image" for her mantelpiece, which quite satisfied her, though the image, being a Parian angel of

Thorwaldsen's, better suited his taste than its surroundings.

The whole scene served Rosamond for a narrative in her most lively style for Mrs. Poynsett's amusement that evening. There was the further excitement of a letter from Miles, and the assurance that he would be at home in November. Anne had become far less chary of communications from his letters than she had at first been, but of this one she kept back so large a portion in public, that the instant Mrs. Poynsett had bidden them good-night and been wheeled away, Rosamond put a hand on each shoulder, and looking into her face, said, "Now, Anne, let us hear! Miles has found Archie Douglas. It is no use pretending. Fie, Mrs. Anne, why can't you tell me?"

"I was not to tell anyone but Julius."

"Well, I'm Julius. Besides, wasn't I at the very bottom of the tracing him out? Haven't I the best right to know whether it is bad or good?"

"Not bad, I am sure," said Julius, quickly and anxiously.

"Oh no, not bad," answered Anne. "He has seen him—had him on board for a night."

"Where?"

"Off Durban. But this whole sheet about it is marked 'Private—only for Julius,' so I could say nothing about it before your mother. I have hardly glanced at it myself as yet, but I think he says Mr.

Douglas made him promise not to tell her, or Joanna Bowater."

"Not tell Jenny!" cried Rosamond. "And you said it was not bad. He must have gone and married!"

"I do not think that is it," said Anne; "but you shall hear. Miles says:—'I have at last seen our poor cousin Archie. I told you I was following up your brother Sandie's hint about the agents for the hunters; and at last I fell in with a merchant, who, on my inquiry, showed me an invoice that I could have sworn to as in Archie's hand, and described his white hair. It seems he has been acting as manager on an ostrich farm for the last three years, far up the country. So I lost no time in sending up a note to him, telling him, if he had not forgotten old times, to come down and see me while I was lying off Durban Bay. I heard no more for ten days, and had got in the stores and was to sail the next day, thinking he had given us all up, when a boat hailed us just come over the bar. I saw Archie's white head, and in ten minutes I had him on deck. "For heaven's sake—am I cleared, Miles?" was the first thing he said; and when I could not say that he was, it went to my heart to see how the eager look sank away, and he was like a worn-down man of fifty. Poor fellow, I found he had ridden two hundred miles, with the hope that I had brought him news that his innocence was proved, and the revulsion was almost more than

he could bear. You see, he had no notion that we thought him dead, and so he took the entire absence of any effort to trace him as acquiescence in his guilt; and when he found out how it was, he laid me under the strongest injunctions to disclose to no one that he is living—not that he fears any results, but that he says it would only disturb everyone and make them wretched——'"

"He must have gone and married. The wretch!" broke in Rosamond.

"No, oh no!" cried Anne. "Only hear the rest. 'I told him that I could not see that at all, and that there was a very warm and tender remembrance of him among us all, and he nearly broke down, and said, "For heaven's sake then, Miles, let them rest in that! There's more peace for them so." I suppose I looked—I am sure I did not speak—as though I were a little staggered as to whether he were ashamed to be known; for he drew himself up in the old way I should have known anywhere, and told me there was no reason I should fear to shake hands with him; however his name might be blasted at home, he had done nothing to make himself unworthy of his mother and Jenny—and there was a sob again. So I let him know that up to my last letters from home Jenny was unmarried. I even remembered those descriptive words of yours, Nannie, "living in patient peacefulness and cheerfulness on his memory."

"'I was called on deck just then, so I gave him

my home photograph-book, and left him with it. I found him crying like a child over it when I came back; I was obliged to strip it of all my best for him, for I could not move him. We went through the whole of the old story, to see if there were any hope; and when he found that Tom Vivian was dead, and George Proudfoot too, without a word about him, he seemed to think it hopeless. He believes that Proudfoot at least, if not Moy, was deeply in debt to Vivian, though not to that extent, and that Vivian probably incited them to "borrow" from my mother's letter. He was very likely to undertake to get the draft cashed for them, and not to account for the difference. It may have helped to hasten his catastrophe. Moy I never should have suspected; Archie says he should once have done so as little; but he was a plausible fellow, and would do things on the sly, while all along appearing to old Proudfoot as a mentor to George. Archie seemed to feel his prosperity the bitterest pill of all—reigning like one of the squirearchy at Proudfoot Lawn—a magistrate forsooth, with his daughter figuring as an heiress. One thing worth note—Archie says, that when it was too late, he remembered that the under-clerk, Gadley, might not have gone home, and might have heard him explain that the letter had turned up.'"

"Gadley? Why that's the landlord of the 'Three Pigeons!'" exclaimed Rosamond. "It is Mr. Moy's house, and he supports him through thick and thin."

"Yes," said Julius, "the magistrates have been on the point of taking away his licence, but Moy always stands up for him. There is something suspicious in that."

"I heard Miss Moy, with my own ears, tell Mrs. Duncombe that he was the apple of her father's eye," cried Rosamond.

"He's bribed! he's bribed! Oh, I see it all. Well, go on, Anne. If Archie isn't at home before he is a year older——"

Anne went on. "'He allowed that he would have done more wisely in facing it out and standing his trial; but he said, poor fellow, that he felt as if the earth had given way under him. There was not a soul near who believed him; they brought up his father's history against him, and moreover he had been at the races, and had been betting, though in fact he had won, and not lost, and the 20*l.* he had become possessed of was his capital, besides the little he could draw out of the bank.

"'If he could only have seen Jenny in London she would have turned him back. Indeed, that first stage was to consult her, but he fancied he saw the face of the Wilsbro' Superintendent in a cab, and the instinct of avoiding arrest carried him to Southampton, where he got a steerage berth in a sailing vessel, and came out to the Cape. He has lived hard enough, but his Scots blood has stood him in good stead, and he has made something as an ivory-hunter, and now has a

partnership in an ostrich farm in the Amatongula country. Still he held to it that it was better he should continue dead to all here, since Mr. Bowater would never forgive him; and the knowledge of his existence would only hinder Jenny's happiness. You should have seen the struggle with which he said that! He left me no choice, indeed; forbade a word to anyone, until I suggested that I had a wife, and that my said wife and Julius had put me on the scent. He was immensely struck to find that my sweet Nan came from Glen Fraser. He said the evenings he spent there had done more to renew his homesickness, and made him half mad after the sight or sound of us, than anything else had done, and I got him to promise to come and see us when we are settled in the bush. What should you say to joining him in ostrich-hatching? or would it be ministering too much to the vanities of the world? However, I'll do something to get him cleared, if it comes to an appeal to old Moy himself, when I come home. Meantime, remember, you are not at liberty to speak a word of this to anyone but Julius, and, I suppose, his wife. I hope——' There, Rose, I beg your pardon."

"What does he hope?" asked Rosamond.

"He only hopes she is a cautious woman."

"As cautious as his Nan, eh? Ah, Anne! you're a canny Scot, and maybe think holding your tongue as fine a thing as this Archie does; but I can't bear it. I think it is shocking, just wearing

out the heart of the best and sweetest girl in the world."

"At any rate," said Julius, "we must be silent. We have no right to speak, however we may feel."

"You don't expect it will stay a secret, or that he'll go and pluck ostriches like geese, with Miles and Anne, and nobody know it? 'Twould be taking example by their ostriches, indeed!"

"I think so," said Julius, laughing; "but as it stands now, silence is our duty by both Miles, and Archie, and Anne herself. We must not make her repent having told us."

"It's lucky I'm not likely to fall in with Jenny just yet," said Rosamond. "Don't leave me alone with her, either of you; if you do, it is at your peril. It is all very well to talk of honour and secrets, but to see the look in her eyes, and know he is alive, seems to me rank cruelty and heartlessness. It is all to let Miles have the pleasure of telling when he comes home."

"Miles is not a woman, nor an Irishwoman," said Julius.

"But he's a sailor, and he's got a feeling heart," said Rosamond; "and if he stands one look of Jenny, why, I'll disown him for the brother-in-law I take him for. By the bye, is not Raymond to know?"

"No," said Anne; "here is a postscript forbidding my telling him or Mrs. Poynsett."

"Indeed! And I suppose Herbert knows nothing?"

"Nothing. He was a boy at school at the time. Say nothing to him, Rose."

"Oh, no; besides, his brain is all run to cricket."

It was but too true. When the sun shone bright in April, and the wickets were set up, Herbert had demonstrated that his influence was a necessity on the village green; and it was true that his goodly and animated presence was as useful morally to the eleven as it was conducive to their triumphs; so his Rector suppressed a few sighs at the frequency of the practices and the endless matches. Compton had played Wilsbro' and Strawyers, Duddingstone and Woodbury; the choir had played the school, the single the married; and when hay and harvest absorbed the rustic eleven, challenges began among their betters. The officers played the county—Oxonians, Cantabs, Etonians, Harrovians—and wherever a match was proclaimed, that prime bowler, the Reverend Herbert Bowater, was claimed as the indispensable champion of his cause and country.

If his sister had any power to moderate his zeal, she had had little chance of exercising it; for Mrs. Bowater had had a rheumatic fever in March, and continued so much of an invalid all the summer that Jenny seldom went far from home, only saw her brother on his weekly visits to the sick-room, and was, as Rosamond said, unlikely to become a temptation to the warm heart and eager tongue.

The week-day congregation were surprised one August morning at eight o'clock by the entrance of three ladies in the most recent style of fashionable simplicity, and making the most demonstrative tokens of reverence. As the Rector came out he was seized upon at once by the elder lady.

"Mr. Charnock! I must introduce myself; I knew your dear mother so well when we were both girls. I am so delighted to find such a church—quite an oasis; and I want to ascertain the best hour for calling on her. Quite an invalid—I was so shocked to hear it. Will the afternoon suit her? I am only here for three days to deposit these two girls, while I take the other on a round of visits. Three daughters are too great an affliction for one's friends, and Bee and Conny are so delighted to be near their brother and with dear Lena Vivian, that I am very glad above all, since I find there are real church privileges—so different from the Vicar of Wilsbro'. Poor man; he is a great trial."

All this was said between the church and the lych-gate, and almost took Julius's breath away; but Mrs. Poynsett was prepared to welcome her old friend with some warmth and more curiosity.

Lady Susan Strangeways was a high-bred woman, but even high breeding could not prevent her from being overwhelming, especially as there was a great deal more of her than there had been at the last meeting of the friends, so that she was suggestive of Hawthorne's

inquiry, whether a man is bound to so many more pounds of flesh than he originally wedded. However, it was prime condition, and activity was not impeded, but rather received impetus. She had already, since her matutinal walk of more than a mile and back, overhauled the stores for the bazaar, inspected the town-hall, given her advice, walked through the ruins for the church, expressed herself strongly on the horrors of the plan, and begun to organize shilling cards, all before Sir Harry had emerged from his room.

She was most warm-hearted and good-natured, and tears glistened in her honest grey eyes as she saw her old friend's helpless state. "You don't know how much I have improved," said Mrs. Poynsett; "I feel quite at liberty in this chair, all owing to my good daughters-in-law."

"Ah! I have so pitied you for having no girls! My dear daughters have been so entirely one with me—such a blessing in all I have gone through."

Mrs. Poynsett of course declared her complete comfort in her five sons, but Lady Susan was sure that if she had had as many boys, instead of one son and four daughters, she should have been worn out. Lorimer was a dear, affectionate fellow. Those he loved could guide him with a leash of gossamer, but young men in his position were exposed to so many temptations! There ensued a little sighing over the evils of wealth; and to see and hear the two ladies no one would have thought that Julia Poyn-

sett had married a young man for love—Susan Lorimer an old man for an independence.

Possibly with her present principles she would not have done so; but through the vista of a long and prosperous widowhood deficiencies in the courtship were easily forgotten; and perhaps there was the more romance and sentiment now because she had been balked of it in her youth. She had freely allowed her eldest daughter to enter a sisterhood from the purest, most unselfish motives, but there was compensation in talking of her Margaret as a Sister of Mercy.

And ere long she was anxiously inquiring Mrs. Poynsett's opinion of Eleonora Vivian, and making confidences somewhat trying to the mother of the young lady's ardent lover.

She was quite aware that as to fortune there could hardly be a worse match than Miss Vivian; but she was sensible enough to see that her son had a sufficiency, and generous enough to like the idea of redeeming the old estate. Her husband had spent his latter years in a vain search for a faultless property, and his wealth was waiting for Lorimer's settling down. She had always regretted the having no vassals rightfully her own, and had felt the disadvantages of being Lady Bountiful only by tenant right. To save an old estate from entirely passing out of a family, and relieve "a noble old wreck," like Sir Harry, seemed to her so grand a prospect

that she could not but cast a little glamour over the manner of the shipwreck. Still, to do her justice, her primary consideration was the blessing such a woman as Lenore might be to her son.

She had not fathomed Lady Tyrrell. No woman could do so without knowing her antecedents, but she understood enough to perceive that Eleonora was not happy with her, and this she attributed to the girl's deep nature and religious aspirations. Rockpier was an ecclesiastical paradise to Lady Susan, and a close bond with Lenore, to whom in London she had given all the facilities that lay in her power for persevering in the observances that were alien to the gay household at home. She valued this constancy exceedingly, and enthusiastically dilated on the young lady's goodness, and indifference to the sensation she had created. "Lorimer allows he never saw her equal for grace and dignity."

Allows! Fancy Frank *allowing* any perfection in his Lenore! Was it not possible that a little passing encomium on unusual beauty was being promoted and magnified by the mother into a serious attachment? But Lady Tyrrell was playing into her hands, and Lenore's ecclesiastical proclivities were throwing her into the arms of the family!

It hardly seemed fair to feign sympathy, yet any adverse hint would be treason, and Mrs. Poynsett only asked innocently whether her friend had seen her son Frank.

"Oh yes, often; the handsomest of all your sons, is he not?"

"Perhaps he is *now*."

"My girls rave about his beautiful brown eyes, just as you used to do, Julia, five-and-thirty years ago."

Mrs. Poynsett was sure that whatever she had thought of Miles Charnock's eyes five-and-thirty years ago, she had never raved about them to Susan Lorimer, but she only said, "All my boys are like their father except Charlie."

"But Master Frank has no eyes for anyone but Miss Vivian. Oh yes, I see the little jealousies; I am sorry for him; but you see it would be a shocking bad thing for a younger son like him; whereas Lory could afford it, and it would be the making of him."

Mrs. Poynsett held her peace, and was not sorry that her visitor was called away while she was still deliberating whether to give a hint of the state of the case.

Lady Susan was, however, more aware of it than she knew; Lady Tyrrell had "candidly" given her a hint that there had been "some nonsense about Frank Charnock," but that he could never afford such a marriage, even if his mother would allow it, which she never would. Besides, he had not fallen into a satisfactory set in London—why, it was not needful to tell.

When, after the drive, Lady Tyrrell, fairly tired out by her visitor's unfailing conversation and superabundant energy, had gone to lie down and recruit for the evening, Lady Susan pressed on Eleonora a warm invitation to the house in Yorkshire which she was renting, and where Lorimer would get as much shooting as his colonel would permit. The mention of him made Lenore blush to the ears, and say, "Dear Lady Susan, you are always so kind to me that I ought to be open with you. Don't fancy——"

"I understand, I understand, my dear," broke in Lady Susan. "You shall not be teased. Do not the girls and I care for you for your own sake?"

"I hope so."

The elder lady sprang up and embraced her. Affection was very pleasant to the reserved nature that could do so little to evoke caresses. Yet Eleonora clasped her Rockpier charm in her hand, and added, "I must tell you that so far as I can, without disobedience, I hold myself engaged to Frank Charnock."

"To Frank Charnock?" repeated Lady Susan, startled at this positive statement. "My dear, are you quite sure of his ways?—since he has been in town I mean."

"I know him, and I trust him."

"I'm sure he is a fine-looking young man, and very clever, they say; dear Julia Poynsett's son too,

and they have all turned out so well," said honest Lady Susan; "but though you have been used to it all your life, my dear, a taste for horses is very dangerous in a young man who can't afford to lose now and then, you know."

"I have seriously made up my mind never to marry a man who has anything to do with the turf," said Eleonora.

"Ah, my poor dear, I can understand that," said Lady Susan, aware how ill this told for her Lory. "May I ask, does he know it?"

"It would insult him to say it. None of the Charnocks ever meddle with those things. Ah! I know your son saw him on the Derby-day; but he went down with his eldest brother and his wife—and *that* is a very different thing! I stayed at home you remember—papa had a fit of the gout."

"My dear, I don't want to accuse him. Don't bristle up; only I am sorry, both for my own little plan of having you for my *very* own, and because I fear there is trouble in store for you. It can't be palatable." Here Eleonora shook her head, and her worn, wearied look went to the good-natured heart.

"Dear child, you have gone through a great deal. You shan't be worried or fretted about anybody or anything at Revelrig."

"I should be very glad," said Lenore, who had no fears of Lory personally, though she could not be invited on false pretences.

"You had better come when Bee and Conny meet me. Let me see—will the retreat be over by that time? Are you going to it? You are an associate of St. Faith."

"Yes, but I don't see how I could go to the retreat. Oh, what a relief it would be to have such a week!"

"Exactly what I feel," said Lady Susan, somewhat to her surprise. "It strengthens and sets me right for the year. Dr. Easterby conducts this one. Do you not know him? Is not Rood House near Backsworth?"

"Yes, on the other side, but he is utterly out of my reach. Julius Charnock looks up to him so much; but his name—even more than St. Faith's—would horrify my father."

"You could not go direct there," said Lady Susan; "but when once you are with me you are my charge, and I could take you."

She considered a little. Both she and her friend knew that all her religious habits were alien to Sir Harry, and that what he had freely permitted, sometimes shared at Rockpier, was now only winked at, and that if he had guessed the full extent of her observances he would have stormily issued a prohibition.

Could it be wrong to spend part of her visit to Lady Susan with her hostess in a sisterhood, when she had no doubt as to attending services which he absolutely never dreamt of, and therefore did not

forbid? The sacred atmosphere and holy meditations, without external strife and constant watchfulness, seemed to the poor girl like water to the thirsty; and she thought, after all the harass and whirl of the bazaar and race week, she might thus recruit her much-needed strength for the decisive conflicts her majority would bring.

Lady Susan had no doubts. The "grand old wreck" was in his present aspect a hoary old persecutor, and charming Lady Tyrrell a worldly, scheming elder sister. It was as much an act of charity to give their victim an opportunity of devotion and support as if she had been the child of abandoned parents in a back court in East London. Reserve to prevent a prohibition was not in such cases treachery or disobedience; and she felt herself doing a mother's part, as she told her daughters, with some enjoyment of the mystery. Eleonora made no promise, hoping to clear her mind by consideration, or to get Julius's opinion. He and his wife dined at Sirenwood, and found Joe Reynolds's drawings laid out for inspection, while Lady Susan was advising that, instead of selling them, there should be an industrial exhibition of all curiosities of art and nature to be collected in the neighbourhood, and promising her own set of foreign photographs and coloured costumes, which had served such purposes many and many a time.

After dinner the good dame tried to talk to

Rosamond on what she deemed the most congenial subjects; but my Lady Rose had no notion of "shop" at a dinner-party, so she made languid answer that she "left all that to the curates," and escaped to a frivolous young matron on the other side of the room, looking on while her husband was penned in and examined on his services, and his choir, and his system, and his decorations, and his classes, and his schools, for all or any of which Lady Susan pressed on him the aid of the two daughters she was leaving at Sirenwood; and on his hint that this was beyond his parish, she repeated her strong disapproval of the vicar of Wilsbro', whom she had met at dinner the night before, and besides the school there had numerous Sunday teachers.

Julius assented, for he had no redundance of the article, and his senior curate had just started on a vacation ramble with a brother; but a sort of misgiving crossed him as he heard Herbert Bowater's last comic song pealing out, and beheld the pleasingly plain face of a Miss Strangeways on either side of him.

Had he not fought the Eton and Harrow match over again with one of them at dinner? and had not a lawn tennis challenge already passed?

For Lady Tyrrell and Mrs. Charnock Poynsett were to have garden-parties on alternate Wednesdays, and the whole neighbourhood soon followed suit.

"You'll find nobody at home, Jenny," said Julius,

coming out of a cottage opposite, as she rode up to Mrs. Hornblower's, on one of the last days of August. 'Nobody—that is, but my mother. Can you come up and see her?"

"With all my heart; but I must get down here; I'm sent for one of Herbert's shirts. The good boy lets mamma and aunty manage them still! I believe their hearts would break outright if he took to shop ones, like the rest of them. Hush Tartar, for shame! don't you know me? Where's your master?"

"At a garden-party at Duddingstone. Your mother is better, I see."

"Yes, thank you—out driving with papa. Good Rollo!" as the dignified animal rose from the hearth-rug to greet her, waving his handsome tail, and calmly expelled a large tabby cat from the easy-chair, to make room for his friends. "Well done, old Roll! Fancy a cat in such company."

"Herbert's dogs partake his good nature."

"Mungo seems to be absent too."

"Gone with him no doubt. He is the great favourite with one of the Miss Strangeways."

"Which—Herbert or Mungo?"

"Both! I might say, I know the young ladies best by one being rapturous about Tartar and the other about Mungo. Rollo treats both with equally sublime and indifferent politeness, rather as Raymond does."

"What sort of girls are they? Herbert calls them 'awfully jolly'."

"I'm sorry to say I never can think of any other epithet for them. For once it is really descriptive."

"Is it either of them in particular?"

"Confess, Joan, that's what brought you over."

"Perhaps so. Edith heard some nonsense at Backsworth, and mamma could not rest till she had sent me over to see about it; but would there be any great harm in it if it were true? Is not Lady Susan a super-excellent woman?"

"You've hit it again, Jenny. Couple the two descriptions."

"I gather that you don't think the danger great."

"Not at present. The fascination is dual, and is at least a counteraction to the great enchantress."

"That *is* well! It was not wholesome!"

"Whereas, these two are hearty, honest, well-principled girls, quite genuine."

"Yet, you don't say it with all your heart."

"I own I should like to find something they had left undone."

"What, to reduce them to human nature's daily food?"

"Daily, indeed! There's just no escaping them. There they are at matins and evensong."

"How shocking! What, gossip afterwards?"

"Ask Rollo whether Mungo and Tartar don't stand at the lychgate, and if he finds it easy to put an end to the game at play."

"Oh! and he said they never missed a Sunday service, or the school. Do they distract him?"

"Whom would it not distract to see two figures walking in with hunches on their backs like camels, and high-heeled shoes, and hats on the back of their heads, and chains and things clattering all over them?"

"Aren't they lady-like?"

"Oh! they are quite that. Rose says it is all the pink of fashion—only coming it strong—I declare they are infectious!"

"I believe so. I never heard so many nibbles at slang from any of you five, as from the Rector of Compton in the last five minutes. I gather that he is slightly bothered."

"There's so much of it. We are forced to have them to all the meals on Sunday, and their lectures on functions have nearly scared poor Anne to the Pilgrim level again. They have set upon me to get up a choir-concert and a harvest-feast; but happily no one has time for the first at this season, and as to the other, I doubted whether to make this first start after such a rainy summer, and they decide me against it. To have them decorating the church!"

"Awfully jolly," suggested Jenny.

"Even so. They are, if you understand me, technically reverent; they have startled the whole place with their curtsies and crossings in church; but they gabble up to the very porch; and the familiarity with which they discuss High Mass, as they are pleased to

call it! I was obliged to silence them, and I must say they took it nicely."

"How do they suit Lena?"

"She likes them. Lady Susan was a great help to her in London, and she feels the comfort of their honesty. They brought her to church with them one or two mornings, but it knocked her up to walk so early. Insensibly, I think, they do Lady Tyrrell's work in shutting her up from any of us."

"Spite of croquet, which seems perpetual."

"Chronic and sporadic parties make it so. There are few days without that or something else. Cricket or the band at the barracks."

"People say the neighbourhood has never been so gay since Camilla Vivian's marriage. I sometimes wonder whether anything can be going to happen," said Jenny with a sigh, not guessing at what Julius was thinking of; then changing her tone: "Surely Herbert does not go to it all, and leave you alone? O Julius! you should not let him."

"Never mind, Jenny, there's no more work now in the holidays than I am sufficient for; and for him, it is quite as guileless play as ever he had twenty years ago. It will soon be over, or I should take it more seriously."

"But it is at such a time!"

"Yes, that is the worst of it. I have thought it over; but while he is in this mood, the making him feel victimised and interfered with has a worse effect than the letting him have his swing."

"What is he doing now, I wonder. Here's his sermon-paper on the table, and a Greek Testament, and 'Hints on Decorating Churches,' with 'Constance Strangeways,' on the first leaf—no other book. How long will this saturnalia last?"

"Up to the Ordination, I fear. You know the good people have contrived to put bazaar, races, and ball, all into the Ember Week, and they are the great object of the young ladies' visit. Could you have him home for a quiet week first?"

"It would not be a quiet week; Edith is in the way of most of these affairs; besides, to open fire about these young ladies might just be putting nonsense into an innocent head. Now, I've not seen your Rectory!"

The said Rectory was in a decided state of fresh not to say raw, novelty outside, though the old trees and garden a little softened its hard greys and strong reds; but it promised to look well when crumbling and weather-stain had done their work. At the door they met the pretty young nurse, with a delicate sea-green embroidered cashmere-bundle in her arms.

"Little Lady Green Mantle," exclaimed Jenny.

"Erin-go-bragh," said Julius. "Rose clung to her colours in spite of all predictions about 'the good people.' Asleep of course," as Jenny took her and uncovered her face. "She won't exhibit her eyes, but they are quite *proper* coloured."

"Yes, I see she is like Raymond!"

"Do you? They all say she is a perfect Charnock, though how they know I can't guess. There," after a little more baby-worship, "you may take her, Emma."

"Is that the under-nurse?" asked Jenny, rather surprised by her juvenility.

"The sole one. My mother and Susan are rather concerned, but Rose asserts that experience in that department is always associated with gin; and she fell in love with this girl—a daughter of John Gadley's, who is much more respectable than he of the 'Three Pigeons.' I suppose it is not in the nature of things for two women to have the same view of nursery matters, unless one have brought up the other."

"Or even if she have. Witness mamma's sighs over Mary's nurses."

"I thought it was the common lot. You've not seen the dining-room." And the full honours were done. They were pleasant rooms, still unpapered, and the furniture, chiefly of amber-coloured varnished deal; the drawing-room, chiefly with green furniture, with only a few brighter dashes here and there, and a sociable amount of comfortable litter already. The study was full of new shelves and old books, and across the window-sill lay a grey figure, with a book and a sheet of paper.

"You here, Terry! I thought you were gone with Rose," said Julius, as the boy rose to greet Miss Bowater.

"She said I need not, and I hate those garden-parties," said Terry; and they relieved him of their presence as soon as Jenny had paid her respects to the favourite prints and photographs on the walls.

"He has a passion for the history of Poland just now," said Julius. "Sobieski is better company than he would meet at Duddingstone, I suspect—poor fellow! Lord Rathforlane has been so much excited by hearing of Driver's successes as a coach, as to desire Terry to read with him for the Royal Engineers. The boys must get off his hands as soon as possible, he says, and Terry, being cleverest, must do so soonest; but the boy has seen the dullest side of soldiering, and hates it. His whole soul is set on scholarship. I am afraid it is a great mistake."

"Can't you persuade him?"

"We have both written; but Rose has no great hopes of the résult. I wish he could follow his bent."

"Yes," said Jenny, lingering as she looked towards Church-house, "the young instinct ought not to be repressed."

Julius knew that she was recollecting how Archie Douglas had entreated to go to sea, and the desire had been quashed because he was an only son. His inclination to speak was as perilous as if he had been Rosamond herself, and he did not feel it unfortunate that Jenny found she must no longer stay away from home.

CHAPTER II.

TIMES OUT OF JOINT.

"Alte der Meere
Komm und höre
Meine Frau, die Ilsebill
Will nicht als ich will!"

LIFE at Compton Poynsett was different from what it had been when the two youngest sons had been at home, and Julius and Rosamond in the house. The family circle had grown much more stiff and quiet, and the chief difference caused by Mrs. Poynsett's presence was that Raymond was deprived of his refuge in her room. Cecil had taken a line of polite contempt. There was always a certain languid amount of indifferent conversation, "from the teeth outward," as Rosamond said. Every home engagement was submitted to the elder lady with elaborate scrupulousness, almost like irony. Visitors in the house, or invitations out of it, were welcome breaks, and the whirl of society which vaguely alarmed Joanna Bowater was a relief to the inhabitants of the hall.

Anne's companionship was not lively for her mother-in-law, but she was brightening in the near prospect of Miles's return, and they had established habits that carried them well through the evening. Anne covered screens and made scrap-books, and did other work for the bazaar; and Mrs. Poynsett cut out pictures, made suggestions, and had associations of her own with the combinations of which Anne had little notion. Or she dictated letters which Anne wrote, and through all these was a kindly, peaceful spirit, most unlike the dreary alienation in which Cecil persevered.

To Cecil this seemed the anxious desire for her lawful rights. She had been used to spend the greater part of the evening at the piano, but her awakened eyes perceived that this was a cover to Raymond's conversations at his mother's sofa; so she sat tying knots in stiff thread at her macrame lace pillow, making the bazaar a plea for nothing but work. Raymond used to arm himself with the newspapers as the safest *point d'appui*, and the talk was happiest when it *only* languished, for it could do much worse.

"Shall you be at Sirenwood to-morrow, Cecil?" asked Mrs. Poynsett, as she was wheeled to her station by the fire after dinner. "Will you kindly take charge of a little parcel for me? One of the Miss Strangeways asked me to look for some old franks, so Anne and I have been turning out my drawers."

"Are they for sale?" asked Raymond.

"Yes," said Cecil. "Bee Strangeways is collecting; she will pay for all that are new to her, and sell any duplicates."

"Has she many?" asked Mrs. Poynsett, glad of this safe subject.

"Quantities; and very valuable ones. Her grandfather knew everybody, and was in the Ministry."

"Was he?" said Raymond, surprised.

"Lord Lorimer?" said Mrs. Poynsett. "Not when I knew them. He was an old-fashioned Whig, with some peculiar crotchets, and never could work with any Cabinet."

"Beatrice told me he was," said Cecil, stiffly.

"I rather think he was Master of the Buckhounds for a little while in the Grey Ministry," said Mrs. Poynsett, "but he gave it up because he would not vote with ministers on the poor laws."

"I knew I was not mistaken in saying he was in the Ministry," said Cecil.

"The Master of the Buckhounds is not in the Cabinet, Cecil," said her husband.

"I never said he was. I said he was in office," returned the infallible lady.

Mrs. Poynsett thought it well to interrupt by handing in an envelope franked by Sir Robert Peel; but Cecil at once declared that the writing was different from that which Bee already owned.

"Perhaps it is not the same Sir Robert," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"She got it from the *Queen*, and they are all authenticated. The *Queen* newspaper, of course" (rather petulantly).

"Indisputable," said Raymond; "but this frank contained a letter from the second Sir Robert to my father."

Mrs. Poynsett made a sign of acquiescence, and Cecil pouted in her dignified way, though Mrs. Poynsett tried to improve matters by saying, "Then it appears that Miss Strangeways will have a series of Peel autographs, all in fact but the first generation."

Common sense showed she was right, but Cecil still felt discontented, for she knew she had been resisted and confuted, and she believed it was all Mrs. Poynsett's doing instead of Raymond's.

And she became as mute as Anne for the next half-hour, nor did either Raymond or his mother venture on starting any fresh topic, lest there might be fresh jarring.

Only Anne presently came up to Mrs. Poynsett and tenderly purred with her over some little preparation for Miles.

Certainly Anne was the most improved in looks of all the three brides, who had arrived just a year ago. The thin, scraggy Scotch girl, with the flabby, washed-out look alternating with angular rigidity was gone, but the softening and opening of her expression, the light that had come into her eyes, and had made them a lovely blue instead of pale grey; the rose-

tint on her cheeks, the delicate rounded contour of her face, the improved carriage of her really fine figure, the traces of style in the braiding of her profuse flaxen hair, and the taste that was beginning to conquer in the dress, were all due to the thought that the *Salamanca* might soon be in harbour. She sat among them still as a creature whose heart and spirit were not with them.

That some change must come was felt as inevitable by each woman, and it was Mrs. Poynsett who began, one forenoon when her son had brought a lease for her to sign. "Raymond," said she, "you know Church-house is to be vacant at Michaelmas. I wish you would look at it, and see what repairs it wants, and if the drawing-room windows could be made to open on the lawn."

"Are you hoping to tempt Miles to settle there?"

"No, I fear there is no hope of that; but I do not think an old broken-backed invalid ought to engross this great house."

"Mother, I cannot hear you say so! This is your own house!"

"So is the other," she said, trying to smile, "and much fitter for my needs, with Susan and Jenkins to look after me."

"There is no fit place for you but this. You said that once."

"Under very different circumstances. All the younger boys were still under my wing, and needed

the home, and I was strong and vigorous. It would not have been acting right by them to have given up the place; but now they are all out in the world, and I am laid by, my stay here only interferes with what can be much better managed without me or my old servants."

"I do not see that. If anyone moves, it should be ourselves."

"You are wanted on the spot continually. If Sirenwood were in the market, that might not be so much amiss."

"I do not think that likely. They will delay the sale in the hope of Eleonora's marrying a rich man; besides, Mr. Charnock has set his mind upon Swanslea. I hope *this* is from nothing Cecil has said or done!"

"Cecil wishes to part then? She has said nothing to me, but I see she has to you. Don't be annoyed, Raymond; it is in the nature of things."

"I believe it is all Lady Tyrrell's doing. The mischief such a woman can do in the neighbourhood!"

"Perhaps it is only what any friend of Cecil would advise."

"It is the very reverse of what I intended," said Raymond, shading his face.

"My dear Raymond, I know what you meant, and what you wish; but I am also certain it is for no one's happiness to go on in this way."

He groaned.

"And the wife's right comes first."

"Not to this house."

"But to this man. Indeed I see more hope of your happiness now than I did last year."

"What, because she has delivered herself over, bound hand and foot to Camilla Vivian?"

"No, because she is altered. Last year she was merely vexed at my position in the house. Now she is vexed at my position with you."

"Very unjustly."

"Hardly so. I should not have liked your father to be so much devoted to his mother. Remember, jealousy is a smoke that cannot exist without some warmth."

"If she had any proper feeling for me, she would show it by her treatment of you."

"That would be asking too much when she thinks I engross you."

"Mother, while you show such marvellous candour and generosity, and she——"

"Hush! Raymond, leave it unsaid! We cannot expect her to see more than her own side of the question. She has been put into an avowedly trying position, and does not deserve hard judgment for not being happy in it. All that remains is to relieve her. Whether by my moving or yours is the question. I prefer the Church-house plan."

"Either way is shame and misery to me," broke out Raymond in a choked voice.

"Nonsense," said his mother, trying to be cheerful, "You made an impracticable experiment, that's all.

Give Cecil free scope, let her feel that she has her due, and all will come right."

"Nothing can be done till after the Wilsbro' business," said Raymond, glad of the reprieve. He could not bear the prospect of banishment for his mother or himself from the home to which both were rooted; and the sentence of detachment from her was especially painful when she seemed his only consolation for his wife's perverseness. Yet he was aware that he had been guilty of the original error, and was bound to give such compensation to his wife as was offered by his mother's voluntary sacrifice. He was slow to broach the subject, but only the next morning came a question about an invitation to a dull house.

"But," said Cecil, "it is better than home." She spoke on purpose.

"I am sorry to hear you say so."

"I can't call it home where I am but a guest."

"Well, Cecil, my mother offers to leave the home of her life and retire into Church-house."

Cecil felt as if the screw she had been long working had come off in her hands. She frowned, she gazed, collecting her senses, while Raymond added, "It is to my intense grief and mortification, but I suppose you are gratified."

"Oh, it would never do!" she exclaimed, to his surprise and pleasure.

"Quite right," he returned. "Just what I felt.

Nothing can make me so glad as to see that you think the idea as shocking as I do."

"Our going to Swanslea would be much better—far more natural, and no one could object. We could refurnish, and make it perfect; whereas nothing can be done to this place, so inconveniently built and buried in trees. I should feel much freer in a place of my own."

"So that is what you meant when I thought you were thinking of my mother?"

"I am obliged to take thought for myself when you take heed to no one but her," said Cecil; and as the carriage was at that moment announced, she left him. Which was the most sick at heart it would be hard to say, the wife with the sense that she was postponed in everything to the mother, the husband at the alienation that had never before been so fully expressed. Cecil's errand was a council about the bazaar; and driving round by Sirenwood, Lady Tyrrell became her companion in the carriage. The quick eyes soon perceived that something had taken place, and confidence was soon drawn forth.

"The ice is broken; and by whom do you think?"

"By *la belle mère?* Skilful strategy to know when the position is not tenable."

"She wants to retreat to Church-house."

"Don't consent to that."

"I said I should prefer Swanslea for ourselves."

"Hold to that, whatever you do. If she moves to

the village you will have all the odium and none of the advantages. There will be the same daily haunt; and as to your freedom of action, there are no spies like the abdicated and their dependents. A very clever plan, but don't be led away by it."

"No," said Cecil resolutely; but after a moment: "It would be inconvenient to Raymond to live so far away from the property."

"Swanslea will be property too, and a ride over on business is not like strolling in constantly."

"I know I shall never feel like my own mistress in a house of hers."

"Still less with her close by, with the Rectory family running in and out to exchange remarks. No, no, hold fast to insisting that she must not leave the ancestral halls. That you can do dutifully and gracefully."

Cecil knew she had been betrayed into the contrary; but they were by this time in the High-street, bowing to others of the committee on their way to the town-hall, a structure of parti-coloured brick in harlequin patterns, with a peaked roof, all over little sham domes, which went far to justify its title of the Rat-house, since nothing larger could well use them. The façade was thus somewhat imposing; of the rear the less said the better; and as to the interior, it was at present one expanse of dust, impeded by scaffold poles, and all the windows had large blotches of paint upon them.

It required a lively imagination to devise situations for the stalls; but Mrs. Duncombe valiantly tripped about, instructing her attendant carpenter with little assistance except from the well-experienced Miss Strangeways. The other ladies had enough to do in keeping their plumage unsoiled. Lady Tyrrell kept on a little peninsula of encaustic tile, Cecil hopped across birdlike and unsoiled, Miss Slater held her carmelite high and dry, but poor Miss Fuller's pale blue and drab, trailing at every step, became constantly more blended!

The dust induced thirst. Lady Tyrrell lamented that the Wilsbro' confectioner was so far off and his ices doubtful, and Miss Slater suggested that she had been making a temperance effort by setting up an excellent widow in the lane that opened opposite to them in a shop with raspberry vinegar, ginger-beer, and the like mild compounds, and Mrs. Duncombe caught at the opportunity of exhibiting the sparkling water of the well which supplied this same lane. The widow lived in one of the tenements which Pettitt had renovated under her guidance, and on a loan advanced by Cecil, and she was proud of her work.

"Clio Tallboys would view this as a triumph," said Mrs. Duncombe, as, standing on the steps of the town-hall, she surveyed the four tenements at the corner of the alley. "Not a man would stir in the business except Pettitt, who left it all to me."

"Taking example by the Professor," said Lady Tyrrell.

"It is strange," said Miss Slater, "how much illness there has been ever since the people went into those houses. They are in my district, you know."

"You should make them open their windows," said Mrs. Duncombe.

"They lay it on the draughts."

"And stuff up my ventilators. That is always the way they begin."

The excellent widow herself had a bad finger, which was a great impediment in administering the cooling beverages, but these were so excellent as to suggest the furnishing of a stall therewith for the thirsty, as something sure to be popular and at small expense. Therewith the committee broke up, all having been present but Miss Moy, whose absence was not regretted, though apologised for by Mrs. Duncombe. "I could not get her away from the stables," she said. "She and Bob would contemplate Dark Hag day and night, I believe."

"I wouldn't allow it," said Lady Tyrrell.

Mrs. Duncombe shrugged her shoulders and laughed. "That's Mr. Moy's look-out," she said.

"You don't choose to interfere with her emancipation," said Lady Tyrrell.

"Clio would tell you she could take care of herself at the stables as well as anywhere else."

"Query?" said Lady Tyrrell. "Don't get into a

scrape, Bessie! Does your Captain report on the flirtation with young Simmonds?"

"Who is he?" asked Cecil.

"The trainer's son," said Bessie. "It is only a bit of imitation of Aurora Floyd."

"You know she's an heiress," said Lady Tyrrell. "You had better take care how you put such a temptation in his way."

"I don't suppose the Moys are anybody," said Cecil.

"Not in your sense, my dear," said Lady Tyrrell laughing; "but from another level there's a wide gap between the heiress of Proudfoot Lawn and the heir of the training stables."

"Cecil looks simply disgusted," said Bessie. "She can't bear the Moys betwixt the wind and her nobility."

"They are the great drawback to Swanslea, I confess," said Cecil.

"Oh! are you thinking of Swanslea?" cried Mrs. Duncombe.

"Yes," said Lady Tyrrell, "she is one to be congratulated on emancipation."

"Well can I do so," said Mrs. Duncombe. 'Don't I know what mothers-in-law are? Mine is the most wonderful old Goody, with exactly the notions of your meek Mrs. Miles."

"Incompatibility decidedly," said Lady Tyrrell.

"Only she was the Spartan mother combined with

it," continued Mrs. Duncombe. "When Bob was a little urchin, he once, in anticipation of his future tastes, committed the enormity of riding on a stick on Sunday; so she locked him up till he had learnt six verses of one of Watts's hymns about going to church being like a little heaven below, isn't it?"

"Increasing his longing that way," said Lady Tyrrell.

"She doesn't even light the drawing-room fire on Sunday, for fear people should not sit in their rooms and meditate," continued Mrs. Duncombe. "Bob manages to be fond of her through all; but she regularly hates me."

"Not very wonderful," said Lady Tyrrell laughing. "I suppose there is a charming reciprocity of feeling."

"I think I can afford to pity her," said Mrs. Duncombe lightly. "Just fancy what I must have been to her! You know I was brought up in a convent at Paris. The very bosom of the scarlet woman."

"But," interrupted Cecil, "you were never a Roman Catholic, Bessie!"

"Oh dear no; the Protestant boarders were let entirely alone. There were only two of us, and we lay in bed while the others went to mass, and played while they went to confession, that was all. I was an orphan; never remember my mother, and my father died abroad. Luckily for me, Bob was done for by my first ball. Very odd he should have liked a little

red-haired thing like me; but everyone is ticketed, I believe. My uncle was glad enough to get rid of me, and poor old Mrs. Duncombe was unsuspecting till we went home, and then!"

"And then?"

"Cecil may have some faint idea."

"Of what you underwent?"

"She wanted to begin on me as if I were a wild savage heathen, you know! I believe she nearly had a fit when I declined a prayer-meeting, and as to my walking out with Bob on Sunday evening!"

"Did she make you learn Watts's hymns?"

"No! but she did what was much worse to poor Bob. She told him she had spent the time in prayer and humiliation, and the poor fellow very nearly cried."

"Ah, those mothers have such an advantage over their sons," said Lady Tyrrell.

"I determined I would never go near her again after that," said Mrs. Duncombe. "Bob goes; he is really fond of her; but I knew we should keep the peace better apart. I let her have the children now and then, when it is convenient, and oddly enough they like it; but I shall soon have to stop that, for I won't have them think me a reprobate; and she has thought me ten times worse ever since I found out that I had brains and could use them."

"Quite true," said Camilla; "there's no peacemaker like absence."

"The only pity is that Swanslea is no further off," returned Bessie.

And so it was that Cecil, backed by her two counsellors, held her purpose, and Raymond sadly spoke of the plan of separation to Julius. Both thought Mrs. Poynsett's own plan the best, though they could not bear the idea of her leaving her own house. Raymond was much displeased.

"At least," he said, "there is a reprieve till this frantic fortnight is over. I envy your exemption from the turmoil."

"I wish you would exempt yourself from the races," said Julius. "The mischief they have done in these villages is incalculable! The very men-servants are solicited to put into sweepstakes, whenever they go into Wilsbro'; and only this morning Mrs. Hornblower has been to me about her son."

"I thought he was the great feather in Herbert Bowater's cap."

"Showing the direction of the wind only too well. Since Herbert has been infected with the general insanity, poor Harry Hornblower has lapsed into his old ways, and is always hanging about the 'Three Pigeons' with some of the swarm of locusts who have come down already to brawl round the training stables. This has come to Truelove's ears, and he has notice of dismissal. At the mother's desire I spoke to Truelove, but he told me that at last year's races the lad had gambled at a great rate, and had

only been saved from dishonesty by detection in time. He was so penitent that Truelove gave him another trial, on condition that he kept out of temptation; but now he has gone back to it, Mr. Truelove thinks it the only way of saving him from some fresh act of dishonesty. 'It is all up with them,' he says, when once they take that turn.'"

"You need not speak as if I were accountable for all the blackguardism."

"Every man is accountable who lends his name and position to bolster up a field of vice."

"Come, come, Julius. Remember what men have been on the Turf."

"If those men had withheld their support, fashion would not have led so many to their ruin."

"Hundreds are present without damage. It is a hearty out-of-doors country amusement, and one of the few general holidays that bring all ranks together."

"You speak of racing as it has been or might be in some golden age," said Julius. "Of course there is no harm in trying one horse's speed against another; but look at the facts, and say whether it is right to support an amusement that becomes such an occasion of evil."

"Because a set of rascals choose to bring their villanies there, you would have the sport of the whole neighbourhood given up. 'No cakes and ale' with a vengeance!"

"The cakes and ale that make a brother offend ought to be given up."

"That sentences all public amusements."

"Not necessarily. The question is of degree. Other amusements may have evil incidentally connected with them, and may lead to temptation, but it is not their chief excitement. The play or the opera is the prime interest, and often a refined and elevated one, but at races the whole excitement depends upon the horses, and is so fictitious that it needs to be enhanced by this betting system. No better faculty is called into play. Some few men may understand the merits of the horse; many more, and most of the ladies, simply like the meeting in numbers; but there is no higher faculty called out, and in many cases the whole attraction is the gambling, and the fouler wickedness in the background."

"Which would be ten thousand times worse if all gentlemen stood aloof."

"What good do these gentlemen do beyond keeping the contest honourable and the betting in which they are concerned? Do not they make themselves decoys to the young men on the border-land who would stay away if the Turf were left to the mere vulgar? Why should they not leave it to drop like bull-baiting or cock-fighting?"

"Well done, Julius!" said Raymond. "You will head a clerical crusade against the Turf, but I do not think it just to compare it with those ferocious sports

which were demoralizing in themselves; while this is to large numbers simply a harmless holiday and excuse for an outing, not to speak of the benefit to the breed of horses."

"I do not say that all competitions of speed are necessarily wrong, but I do say that the present way of managing races makes them so mischievous that no one ought to encourage them."

"I wonder what Backsworth and Wilsbro' would say to you! It is their great harvest. Lodgings for those three days pay a quarter's rent; and where so many interests are concerned, a custom cannot lightly be dropped."

"So thought the craftsmen of Ephesus."

"Well," said Raymond with a sigh, "it is not pleasure that takes me. I shall look on with impartial eyes, if that is what you wish."

Poor Raymond! it was plain that he had little liking for anything that autumn. He rode over to Swanslea with Cecil, and when he said it was six miles off, she called it four; what he termed bare, marshy, and dreary, was in her eyes open and free; his swamp was her lake; and she ran about discovering charms and capabilities where he saw nothing but damp and dry-rot, and, above all, banishment.

Would she have her will? Clio would have thought her lecture had taken effect, and mayhap, it added something to the general temper of self-assertion, but in fact Cecil had little time to think, so thickly did

gaieties and preparations crowd upon her. It was the full glory and importance of the member's wife, her favourite ideal, but all the time her satisfaction was marred by secret heartache as she saw how wearily and formally her husband dragged through whatever fell to his lot, saw how jaded and depressed he looked, and heard him laugh his company laugh without any heart in it. She thought it all his mother's fault, and meant to make up for everything when she had him to herself.

Julius had his troubles. When Rosamond found that races were what she called his pet aversion, she resisted with all her might. Her home associations were all on fire again. She would not condemn the pleasures she had shared with her parents, by abstinence from them, any more than she would deviate from Lady Rathforlane's nursery management to please Mrs. Poynsett and Susan. A bonnet, which Julius trusted never to see in church, was purchased in the face of his remark that every woman who carried her gay attire to the stand made herself an additional feather on the hook of evil. At first she laughed, and then grew tearfully passionate in protests that nothing should induce her to let her brothers see what their own father did turned into a crime; and if they went without her to take care of them, and fell into mischief, whose fault would that be?

It was vain to hint that Tom was gone back to school, and Terry cared more for the Olympic dust

than that of Backsworth. She had persuaded herself that his absence would be high treason to her father, whom she respected far more at a distance than when she had been struggling with his ramshackle, easy-going ways. Even now, she was remonstrating with him about poor Terry's present misery. His last half year had been spent under the head-master, who had cultivated his historical and poetical intelligence, whereas Mr. Driver was nothing but an able crammer; and the moment the lad became interested and diverged from routine, he was choked off because such things would not "tell." If the "coach" had any enthusiasm it was for mathematics, and thitherwards Terry's brain was undeveloped. With misplaced ingenuity, he argued that sums came right by chance, and that Euclid was best learnt by heart, for "the pictures" simply confused him; and when Julius, amazed at finding so clever a boy in the novel position of dunce, tried to find out what he did know of arithmetic, his ignorance and inappreciation were so unfathomable that Julius doubted whether the power or the will was at fault. At any rate he was wretched in the present, and dismal as to the future, and looked on his brother-in-law as in league with the oppressors for trying to rouse his sense of duty.

Remonstrance seemed blunted and ineffective everywhere. When Herbert Bowater tried to reclaim Harry Hornblower into giving up his notorious

comrades, he received the dogged reply, "Why should not a chap take his pleasure as well as you?"

With the authority at once of clergyman and squire's son, he said, "Harry, you forget yourself. I am not going to discuss my occupations with you."

"You know better," rudely interrupted the lad. "Racketing about all over the country, and coming home late at night. You'd best not speak of other folks!"

As a matter of fact, Herbert had never been later than was required by a walk home from a dinner, or a very moderate cricket supper; and his conscience was clear as to the quality of his amusements; but instead of, as hitherto, speaking as youth to youth, he used the language of the minister to the insulting parishioner. "I am sorry I have disturbed Mrs. Hornblower, but the case is not parallel. Innocent amusement is one thing—it is quite another to run into haunts that have already proved dangerous to your principles."

Harry Hornblower laughed. "It's no go coming the parson over me, Mr. Bowater! It's well known what black coats are, and how they never cry out so loud upon other folks as when they've had a jolly lark among themselves. No concealment now, we're up to a thing or two, and parsons, and capitalists, and squires will have to look sharp."

This oration, smacking of "The Three Pigeons,"

was delivered so loud as to bring the mother on the scene. "O Harry, Harry, you aren't never speaking like that to Mr. Bowater!"

"When folks jaw me about what's nothing to them I always give them as good as they bring. That's my principle," said Harry, flinging out of the house, while the curate tried to console the weeping mother, and soon after betook himself to his rector with no mild comments on the lad's insolence.

"Another warning how needful it is for us to avoid all occasion for misconstruction," said Julius.

"We do, all of us," said Herbert. "Even that wretched decoction, Fuller, and that mere dictionary, Driver, never gave cause for imputations like these. What has the fellow got hold of?"

"Stories of the last century 'two-bottle men,'" said Julius, "trumped up by unionists now against us in these days. The truth is that the world triumphs and boasts whenever it catches the ministry on its own ground. Its ideal is as exacting as the saintly one."

"I say, Rector," exclaimed the curate, after due pause, "you'll be at Evensong on Saturday? The ladies at Sirenwood want me to go to Backsworth with them to hear the band."

"Cannot young Strangeways take care of his sisters?"

"I would not ask it, sir, but they have set their heart on seeing Rood House, and want me to go with

them because of knowing Dr. Easterby. Then I'm to dine with them, and that's the very last of it for me. There's no more croquet after this week."

"I am thankful to hear it," said Julius, suppressing his distaste that the man he most reverenced, and the place which was his haven of rest, should be a mere lion for Bee and Conny, a slight pastime before the regimental band!

CHAPTER III.

THE APPLE OF ATE.

"Oh mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who is the fairest of us all?"
The Three Bears.

"I DO really think Terry has found the secret of happiness, for a *little* while at least," said Rosamond, entering Mrs. Poynsett's room. "That funny little man in the loan museum has asked him to help in the arrangement."

"Who is it?"

"The little watchmaker, or watch cobbler, in the old curiosity shop."

"Friskyball?"

"Yes; Terry calls him a descendant of the Genoese Frescobaldi, and I'm sure his black eyes were never made for an English head. Terry has always haunted those uncanny wares of his, and has pursued them to the museum. ''Tis not every young gentleman I would wish to see there,' says the old man, 'but the Honourable Mr. De Lancey has the soul of an antiquarian.'"

"They say the old man is really very clever and well read."

"He looks like an old magician, with his white cap and spectacles, and he had need to have a wand to bring order out of that awful chaos. Everybody all round has gone and cleared out their rubbish-closet. Upon my word, it looks so. There are pictures all one network of cracks, and iron caps and gauntlets out of all the halls in every stage of rust, and pots and pans and broken crocks, and baskets of coin all verdigris and tarnish!—Pah!"

"Are Miles's birds safe?"

"Oh yes, with a swordfish's sword and a sawfish's saw making a trophy on the top. Terry is in the library, hunting material for a dissertation on the ancient unicorn, which ought to conclude with the battle royal witnessed by Alice in Wonderland. The stuffed department is numerous, but in a bad way as to hair, and chiefly consists of everybody's grandmother's old parrots and squirrels and white rats. Then, every boy, who ever had a fit of birds' eggs or butterflies, has sent in a collection, chiefly minus the lower wings, and with volunteer specimens of moth; but luckily some give leave to do what they please with them, so the magician is making composition animals with the *débris*."

"Not really!"

"I made a feeble attempt with an admiral's wings and an orange tip, but I was scouted. About four

dilapidated ones make up a proper specimen, and I can't think how it is all to be done in the time; but really something fit to be seen is emerging. Terry is sorting the coins, a pretty job, I should say; but felicity to him. But oh! the industrial articles! There are all the regalia, carved out of cherry-stones, and a patchwork quilt of 5,000 bits of silk each no bigger than a shilling. And a calculation of the middle verse in the Bible, and the longest verse, and the shortest verse, and the like edifying Scriptural researches, all copied out like flies' legs, in writing no one can see but Julius with his spectacles off, and set in a brooch as big as the top of a thimble, all done by a one-legged sergeant of marines. So that the line might not be outdone, I offered my sergeant-major's banner-screen, but I am sorry to say they declined it, which made me jealous."

"Are there any drawings of the Reynolds' boy?"

"Yes, Lenore Vivian brought them down, and very good they are. Everyone says he has the making of a genius, but he does not look as if it agreed with him; he is grown tall, and thin, and white, and I should not wonder if those good-for-nothing servants bullied him."

"Did you see anything of Eleonora?"

"Nothing so impossible. I meet her every day, but she is always beset with the Strangeways, and I think she avoids me."

"I can hardly think so."

"I don't like it! That man is always hanging about Sirenwood, and Lenore never stirs an inch without one of those girls. I wish Frank could see for himself, poor fellow."

"He does hope to run down next week. I have just heard from him in high spirits. One of his seniors has come into some property, another is out of health and retires, so there is promotion in view."

"I wish it would make haste then. I don't like the look of things."

"I can hardly disbelieve in the dear girl herself; yet I do feel as if it were against nature for it to succeed. Did you hear anything of Mrs. Bowater to-day?"

"Yes, she is much better, and Edith is coming to go into the gallery with me on Tuesday when they inaugurate the Rat House. Oh! did you hear of the debate about it? You know there's to be a procession—all the Volunteers, and all the Odd Fellows, and all the Good Templars, and all the school children of all denominations—whatever can walk behind a flag. Our choir boys grew emulous, and asked Herbert to ask the Rector to let them have our lovely banner with the lilies on it; but he declined, though there's no choice but to give the holiday that will be taken."

"Was that the debate?"

"Oh no! that was among the higher powers—where the procession should start from. The precedent was an opening that began with going to church, and having a sermon from the Bishop; but then there's

no church, and after that spur the Bishop gave them they can't ask him without one; besides, the mayor dissents, and so do a good many more of them. So they are to meet at the Market Cross, and Mr. Fuller, in the famous black gown, supported by Mr. Driver, is to head them. I'm not sure that Julius and Herbert were not in the programme, but Mr. Truelove spoke up, and declared that Mr. Flynn the Wesleyan Methodist, and Mr. Howler the Primitive Methodist, and Mr. Riffell the Baptist, had quite as good a right to walk in the foreground and to hold forth, and Mr. Moy supported him."

"Popularity hunting against Raymond."

"Precisely. But Howler, Flynn, and Co. were too much for Mr. Fuller, so he seceded, and the religious ceremonies are now to be confined to his saying grace at the dinner. Raymond thinks it as well, for the inaugural speech would only have been solemn mockery; but Julius thinks it a sad beginning for the place to have no blessing because of our unhappy divisions. Isn't that like Julius?"

"Exactly, though I see it more from Raymond's point of view. So you are going to the dinner?"

"Oh yes. Happily my rector has nothing to say against that, and I am sure he owes me something for keeping me out of the bazaar. In fact, having avoided the trouble, I *couldn't* take the pleasure! and he must set that against the races."

"My dear, though I am not set against races like

Julius, I think, considering his strong feelings on the subject——"

"My dear Mrs. Poynsett, it would be very bad for Julius to give in to his fancies. The next thing would be to set baby up in a little hood and veil like a nun!"

Rosamond's winsome nonsense could not but gain a smile. No doubt she was a pleasant daughter-in-law, though, for substantial care, Anne was the strength and reliance. Even Anne was much engrossed by preparations for the bazaar. It had been a great perplexity to her that the one thing she thought not worldly should be condemned by Julius, and he had not tried to prevent her from assisting Cecil, thinking, as he had told Eleonora, that the question of right and wrong was not so trenchant as to divide households.

The banquet and inauguration went off fairly well. There was nothing in it worth recording, except that Rosamond pronounced that Raymond only wanted a particle of Irish fluency to be a perfect speaker; but everyone was observing how ill and depressed he looked. Even Cecil began to see it herself, and to ask Lady Tyrrell with some anxiety whether she thought him altered.

"Men always look worn after a Session," said Lady Tyrrell.

"If this really makes him unhappy!"

"My dear Cecil, that's the very proof of the

necessity. If it makes him unhappy to go five miles away with his wife, it ought not. You should wean him from such dependence."

Cecil had tears in her eyes as she said, "I don't know! When I hear him sighing in his sleep, I long to give it up and tell him I will try to be happy here."

"My dear child, don't be weak. If you give way now, you will rue it all your life."

"If I could have taken to his mother, I think he would have cared more for me."

"No. The moment her jealousy was excited she would have resumed him, and you would have been the more shut out in the cold. A little firmness now, and the fresh start is before you."

Cecil sighed, feeling that she was paying a heavy price for that fresh start, but her hands were too full for much thought. Guests came to dinner, Mrs. Poynsett kept more to her own room, and Raymond exerted himself to talk, so that the blank of the evenings was less apparent. The days were spent at the town-hall, where the stalls were raised early enough for all the ladies, their maids and footmen, to buzz about them all day, decking them out.

Mrs. Duncombe was as usual the guiding spirit, contriving all with a cleverness that made the deficiencies of her household the more remarkable. Conny and Bee Strangeways were the best workers, having plenty of experience and resource, and being ready to do anything, however hard, dusty, or

disagreeable; and to drudge contentedly, with plenty of chatter indeed, but quite as freely to a female as to a male companion; whereas Miss Moy had a knot of men constantly about her, and made a noise which was a sore trial to Cecil's heavy spirit all the first day, exclusive of the offence to her native fastidiousness. She even called upon Lady Tyrrell and Mrs. Duncombe to hold a council whether all gentlemen should not be excluded the next day, as spoiling the ladies' work, and of no use themselves; but there were one or two who really did toil, and so well, that they could not be dispensed with, and Mrs. Duncombe added that it would not do to give offence.

There was a harassed look about Mrs. Duncombe herself, for much depended on the success of her husband's filly, Dark Hag. The captain had hitherto been cautious, and had secured himself against heavy loss, so as to make the Turf a tolerable speculation, but the wonderful perfections of this animal had led him to stake much more on her than had been his wont; and though his wife was assured of being a rich woman in another week, she was not sorry for the multiplicity of occupations which hindered her mind from dwelling too much on the chances.

"How calm you look,—how I envy you!" she said, as she came to borrow some tape of Eleonora Vivian, who was fastening the pendent articles to the drapery of her sister's stall. Eleonora gave a constrained smile, feeling how little truth there was in her apparent

peace, wearied out as she was with the long conflict and constant distrust. She was the more anxious to be with Lady Susan, whose every word she could believe, and she finally promised to leave home with Bee and Conny the day after the ball, and to meet their mother in London. They knew there was no chance for Lorimer, but they took her on her own terms, hoping something perhaps, and at any rate glad to be a comfort to one whom they really loved, while Lady Tyrrell was delighted to promote the visit, seeing that the family did more for Lorimer's cause than he did for himself; and in his own home who could guess the result, especially after certain other manœuvres of her ladyship had taken effect?

Lady Tyrrell did not know, nor indeed did Conny or Bee, that, though they would meet their mother in London, she would not at once go into Yorkshire with them, but would send them to their uncle's, while she repaired to the retreat at St. Faith's. The harass of these last few weeks, especially the endeavour to make her go to the races, had removed all scruples from Lenore's mind as to leaving her home in ignorance of her intentions. To her mind, the circumstances of her brother's death had made a race-course no place for any of the family, especially that of Backsworth; gout coming opportunely to disable her father in London, and one or two other little accidents, had prevented the matter from coming to an issue while she had been in London, and the

avowal of her intention to keep away had filled her father with passion at her for her absurd scruples and pretences at being better than other people. It had been Lady Tyrrell who pacified him with assurances that she would soon do better; no one wished to force her conscience, and Lenore, always on the watch, began to wonder whether her sister had any reason for wishing to keep her away, and longed the more for the house of truth and peace.

So came on the bazaar-day, which Mrs. Poynsett spent in solitude, except for visits from the Rectory, and one from Joanna Bowater, who looked in while Julius was sitting with her, and amused them by her account of herself as an emissary from home with ten pounds to be got rid of from her father and mother for good neighbourhood's sake. She brought Mrs. Poynsett a beautiful bouquet, for the elderly spinsters, she said, sat on the stairs and kept up a constant supply; and she had also some exquisite Genoese wire ornaments from Cecil's counter, and a set of studs from a tray of polished pebbles sent up from Vivian's favourite lapidary at Rockpier. She had been amused to find the Miss Strangeways hunting over it to match that very simple-looking charm which Lena wore on to her watch, for, as she said, "the attraction must either be the simplicity of it, or the general Lena-worship in which those girls indulge."

"How does that dear child look?"

"Fagged, I think, but so does everyone, and it was not easy to keep order, Mrs. Duncombe's counter was such a rendezvous for noisy people, and Miss Moy was perfectly dreadful, running about forcing things on people and refusing change."

"And how is poor Anne enduring?"

"Like Christian in Vanity Fair as long as she did endure, for she retired to the spinsters on the back stairs. I offered to bring her home and she accepted with delight, but I dropped her in the village to bestow her presents. I was determined to come on here; we go on Monday."

"Shall you be at the Ordination?"

"I trust so. If mamma is pretty well, we shall both go."

"Is Edith going to the ball on Thursday?"

"No, she has given it up. It seems as if we at least ought to recollect our Ember days, though I am ashamed to think we never did till this time last year."

"I confess that I never heard of them," said Mrs. Poynsett. "Don't look shocked, my dear; such things were not taught in my time."

Julius showed her the rubric and the prayer from the book in his pocket, knowing that the one endeared to her by association was one of the Prayer-books made easy by omission of all not needed at the barest Sunday service.

"I see," she said, "it seems quite right. I wish

you had told me before you were ordained, my dear."

"You kept your Ember days for me by instinct, dear mother."

"Don't be too sure, Julius. One learns many things when one is laid on one's back."

"Think of Herbert now," whispered Jenny. "I am glad he is sheltered from all this hubbub by being at the palace. I suppose you cannot go to the Cathedral, Julius?"

"No, Bindon will not come back till his brother's holiday is over, nor do I even know where to write to him. Oh! here comes Anne. Now for her impressions."

Anne had brought her little gift for Mrs. Poynsett, and displayed her presents for Glen Fraser, but as to what she had seen, it made her shudder and say "You were right, Julius, I did not know people could go on so! And with all those poor people ill close by. Miss Slater, who sat on the stairs just below me tying up flowers, is much grieved about a lad who was at work there till a fortnight ago, and now is dying of a fever, and harassed by all the rattling of the carriages."

"What! close by? Nothing infectious, I hope?"

"The doctor called it gastric fever, but no one was to hear of it lest there should be an alarm; and it was too late to change the place of the bazaar, though it is so sad to have all that gaiety close at hand."

If these were the impressions of Anne and Joanna early in the day, what were they later, when, in those not sustained by excitement, spirit and energy began to flag? Cecil's counter, with her excellent and expensive wares, and her own dignified propriety, was far less popular than those where the goods were cheaper and the saleswomen less inaccessible, and she was not only disappointed at her failure, but vexed when told that the articles must be raffled for. She could not object, but it seemed an unworthy end for what had cost her so much money and pains to procure, and it was not pleasant to see Mrs. Duncombe and Miss Moy hawking the tickets about, like regular touters, nor the most beautiful things drawn by the most vulgar and tasteless people.

Miss Moy had around her a court of "horsey" men who were lounging away the day before the races, and who had excited her spirits to a pitch of boisterousness such as dismayed Mrs. Duncombe herself when her attempts at repression were only laughed at.

Somehow, among these adherents, there arose a proposal for the election of a queen of beauty, each gentleman paying half-a-crown for the right of voting. Miss Moy bridled and tried to blush. She was a tall, highly coloured, flashing-eyed brunette, to whom a triumph would be immense over the refined, statuesque severe Miss Vivian, and an apple-blossom innocent-looking girl who was also present, and though Lady Tyrrell was incontestably the handsomest person in

the room, her age and standing had probably prevented her occurring to the propounders of the scheme.

The design was taking shape when young Strangeways, who was willing to exchange chaff with Gussie Moy, but was gentleman enough to feel the indecorum of the whole thing, moved across to his sister, and muttered, "I say, Con, they are getting up that stupid trick of election of a queen of beauty. Does Lady Tyrrell know it?"

"Wouldn't it be rather fun?"

"Horrid bad form, downright impudence. Mother would squash it at once. Go and warn one of them," signing with his head.

Constance made her way to Eleonora, who had already been perplexed and angered by more than one critical stare, as one and another man loitered past and gazed intrepidly at her. She hurried at once to her sister, who was sitting passively behind her counter as if wearied out, and who would not be stirred to interference. "Never mind, Lenore, it can't be helped. It is all for the cause, and to stop it would be worse taste, fitting on the cap as an acknowledged beauty, and to that I'm not equal."

"It is an insult."

"Never fear, they'll never choose you while you look so forbidding, though perhaps it is rather becoming. They have not the taste."

Eleonora said no more, but went over to the window

where Raymond was keeping his guard, with his old-fashioned sense of protection. She had no sooner told him than he started into incredulous indignation, in which he was joined by his wife, who only wished him to dash forward to prevent the scheme before he would believe it real.

However, when the ballot-box came his way, and a simpering youth presented him with a card, begging for his opinion, he spoke so as to be heard by all, "No thank you, sir. I am requested by the ladies present to state that such competition was never contemplated by their committee and would be repugnant to all their sentiments. They beg that the election may be at once dropped and the money returned."

Mr. Charnock Poynsett had a weight that no one resisted. There was a moment's silence, a little murmur, apologetic and remonstrant, but the deed was done.

Only a clear voice, with the thrillings of disappointed vanity and exultation scarcely disguised by a laugh, was heard saying, louder than the owner knew, "Oh, of course Mr. Charnock Poynsett spoiled sport. It would have been awkward between his wife and his old flame."

"For shame, Gussie," hushed Mrs. Duncombe, "they'll hear."

"I don't care! Let them! Stuck-up people!"

Whoever heard, Cecil Charnock Poynsett did, and felt as if the ground were giving way with her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LADY GREEN MANTLE.

"The night, just like the night before,
In terrors passed away,
Nor did the demons vanish thence
Before the dawn of day."

Moore.

THE turmoil was over, the gains had been emptied into bags to be counted at leisure, the relics of the sale left to be disposed of through the *Exchange and Mart.* Terry, looking tired to death, descended from his post as assistant showman; and, with some gentlemen who were to dine at Compton Poynsett, Cecil drove home to dress in haste, and act hostess to a large dinner party. All the time she felt giddy at the words she had heard—"Mr. Poynsett's old flame." It was constantly ringing in her ears, and one conviction was before her mind. Her cheeks burnt like fire, and when she reached her own room at night, and leant from the window to cool them, they only burnt the more.

Had she been wilfully deceived? had she been

taking the counsel of a jealous woman about her husband? Had not Camilla assured her that the object of his first love was not in the country? Ay; but when that was spoken Camilla herself was in London, and Cecil knew enough of her friend to be aware that she viewed such a subterfuge as ingenious. Even then she had perceived that the person alluded to could only have been a Vivian, and the exclamation of careless spite carried assurance to her that she had been tricked into confidence, and acceptance of the advice of a rival. She had a feverish longing to know more, and obtain explanation and external certainty. But how?

Raymond was one of the very tired that night. He fell asleep the instant his head touched the pillow; but it was that sobbing, sighing sleep which had before almost swept away, from very ruth, her resolution; and on this night there were faltering words, strangely, though unconsciously, replying to her thoughts. "Camilla, a cruel revenge!" "Poor child! but for you she might have learnt." "My mother!" "Why, why this persistent hatred?" "Cannot you let us alone?" "Must you destroy our home?"

These were the mutterings at intervals. She listened, and in the darkness her impulse was to throw herself on her husband, tell him all, show him how she had been misled, and promise to give up all to which that true Vivienne had prompted her.

She did even try to wake him, but the attempt caused only a more distinct expostulation of "Cannot you let her alone?" "Cannot you let us learn to love one another?" "It may be revenge on me or my mother; but what has she done?" "Don't!—oh, don't!"

The distress she caused forced her to desist, and she remembered how Raymond had always warned her. The intimacy with Lady Tyrrell had been in the teeth of his remonstrances. He had said everything to prevent it short of confessing his former attachment, and though resentful that the warning had been denied her, she felt it had been well that she had been prevented from putting the question on her first impulse. Many ways of ascertaining the fact were revolved by her as with an aching head she lay hopelessly awake till morning, when she fell into a doze which lasted until she found that Raymond had risen, and that she must dress in haste, unless she meant to lose her character for punctuality. Her head still ached, and she felt thoroughly tired; but when Raymond advised her to stay at home, and recruit herself for the ball, she said the air of the downs would refresh her. Indeed, she felt as if quiet and loneliness would be intolerable until she could understand herself and what she had heard.

Raymond took the reins of the barouche, and a gentleman who had slept at the hall went on the box beside him, leaving room for Rosamond and her

brother, who were to be picked up at the Rectory; but when they drew up there, only Rosamond came out in the wonderful bonnet, just large enough to contain one big water-lily, which suited well with the sleepy grace of her movements, and the glossy sheen of her mauve silk.

"Terry is not coming. He has a headache, poor boy," she said, as Julius shut her into the barouche. "Take care of him and baby."

"Take care of yourself, Madam Madcap," said Julius with a smile, as she bent down to give him a parting kiss, with perhaps a little pleading for forgiveness in it. But instead of, as last year, shuddering, either at its folly or publicity, Cecil felt a keen pang of desire for such a look as half rebuked, while it took a loving farewell of Rosamond. Was Camilla like that statue which the husband inadvertently espoused with a ring, and which interposed between him and his wife for ever?

Rosamond talked. She always had a certain embarrassment in *tête-à-têtes* with Cecil, and it took form in a flow of words. "Poor Terry! he turned faint and giddy at breakfast. I thought he had been indulging at the refreshment-stall, but he says he was saving for a fine copy of the *Faerie Queen* that Friskyball told him of at a book-stall at Backsworth, and existed all day on draughts of water when his throat grew dry as showman; so I suppose it is only inanition, coupled with excitement and stuffiness,

and that quiet will repair him. He would not hear of my staying with him."

"I suppose you do not wish to be late?"

"Certainly not," said Rosamond, who, indeed, would have given up before, save for her bonnet and her principle; and whatever she said of Lady Rathforlane's easy management of her nurslings, did not desire to be *too* many hours absent from her Julia.

"I only want to stay till the Three-year-old Cup has been run for," said Cecil. "Mrs. Duncombe would feel it unkind if we did not."

"You look tired," said Rosamond, kindly; "put your feet upon the front seat—nobody will look. Do you know how much you cleared?"

"Not yet," said Cecil. "I do not know what was made by the raffles. How I do hate them! Fancy that lovely opal Venetian vase going to that big bony Scotswoman, Mr. M'Vie's mother."

"Indeed! That is a pity. If I had known it would be raffled for, I would have sent a private commission, though I don't know if Julius would have let me. He says it is gambling. What became of the Spa workbox, with the passion-flower wreath?"

"I don't know. I was so disgusted, that I would not look any more. I never saw such an obnoxious girl as that Miss Moy."

"*That* she is," said Rosamond. "I should think she was acting the fast girl as found in sensation novels."

"Exactly," said Cecil, proceeding to narrate the proposed election; and in her need of sympathy she even told its sequel, adding, "Rosamond, do you know what she meant?"

"Is it fair to tell you?" said Rosamond, asking a question she knew to be vain.

"I must know whether I have been deceived."

"Never by Raymond?" cried Rosamond.

"Never, never, never!" cried Cecil, with most unusual excitement. "He told me all that concerned himself at the very first. I wish he had told me who it was. How much it would have saved! Rosamond, you know, I am sure."

"Yes, I made Julius tell me; but indeed, Cecil, you need not mind. Never has a feeling more entirely died out."

"Do you think I do not know that?" said Cecil. "Do you think my husband could have been my husband if he had not felt *that?*"

"Dear Cecil, I am so glad," cried impulsive Rosamond; her gladness, in truth, chiefly excited by the anger that looked like love for Raymond. "I mean, I am glad you see it so, and don't doubt him."

"I hope we are both above that," said Cecil. "No, it is Camilla that I want to know about. I *must* know whether she told me truth."

"She told! what did she tell you?"

"That *he*—Raymond—had loved some one," said

Cecil in a stifled voice; "that I little knew what his love could be. I thought it had been for her sister in India. She told me that it was nobody in the country. But then we were in town."

"Just like her!" cried Rosamond, and wondered not to be contradicted.

"Tell me how it really was?" only asked Cecil.

"As far as I know, the attachment grew up with Raymond, but it was when the brother was alive, and Sir Harry at his worst; and Mrs. Poynsett did not like it, though she gave in at last, and tried to make the best of it; but then she, Camilla—as you call her—met the old monster, Lord Tyrrell, made up a quarrel, because Mrs. Poynsett would not abdicate, and broke it off."

"She said Mrs. Poynsett only half consented, and that the family grew weary of her persistent opposition."

"And she made you think it Mrs. Poynsett's doing, and that she is not possible to live with! O Cecil! you will not think that any longer. Don't you see that it is breaking Raymond's heart?"

Cecil's tears were starting, and she was very near sobbing as she said, "I thought perhaps if we were away by ourselves he might come to care for me. *She* said he never would while his mother was by—that she would not let him."

"That's not a bit true!" said Rosamond, indignantly. "Is it not what she has most at heart, to see her

sons happy! When has she ever tried to interfere between Julius and me? Not that she could," added Rosamond to herself in a happy little whisper, not meant to be heard, but it was; and with actual, though suppressed sobs, Cecil exclaimed—

"O Rose, Rose! what do you do to make your husband love you?"

"Do? Be very naughty!" said Rosamond, forced to think of the exigencies of the moment, and adding lightly, "There! it won't do to cry. Here are the gentlemen looking round to see what is the matter."

Ardently did she wish to have been able to put Cecil into Raymond's arms and run out of sight, but with two men-servants with crossed arms behind, a strange gentleman in front, the streets of Wilsbro' at hand, and the raceground impending, sentiment was impossible, and she could only make herself a tonic, and declare nothing to be the matter; while Cecil, horrified at attracting notice, righted herself and made protest of her perfect health and comfort. When Raymond, always careful of her, stopped the carriage and descended from his perch to certify himself whether she was equal to going on, his solicitude went to her heart, and she gave his hand, as it lay on the door an affectionate thankful pressure, which so amazed him that he raised his eyes to her face with a softness in them that made them for a moment resemble Frank's.

That was all, emotion must be kept at bay, and as

vehicles thickened round them as they passed through Wilsbro' the two ladies betook themselves to casual remarks upon them. Overtaking the Sirenwood carriage just at the turn upon the down, Raymond had no choice but to take up his station with that on one side, and on the other Captain Duncombe's drag, where, fluttering with Dark Hag's colours, were perched Mrs. Duncombe and Miss Moy, just in the rear of the like conveyance from the barracks.

Greetings, and invitations to both elevations were plentiful, and Rosamond would have felt in her element on the military one. She was rapidly calculating, with her good-natured eye, whether the choice her rank gave her would exclude some eager girl, when Cecil whispered, "Stay with me pray," with an irresistibly beseeching tone. So the Strangeways sisters climbed up, nothing loth; Lady Tyrrell sat with her father, the centre of a throng of gentlemen, who welcomed her to the ground where she used to be a reigning belle; and the Colonel's wife, Mrs. Ross, came to sit with Lady Rosamond. The whole was perfect enjoyment to the last. She felt it a delightful taste of her merry old Bohemian days to sit in the clear September sunshine, exhilarated by the brilliancy and life around, laughing with her own little court of officers, exclaiming at every droll episode, holding her breath with the thrill of universal expectation and excitement, in the wonderful hush of the multitude as the thud of the hoofs and rush in the wind

was heard coming nearer, straining her eyes as the glossy creatures and their gay riders flashed past, and setting her whole heart for the moment on the one she was told to care for.

Raymond, seeing his ladies well provided for, gave up his reins to the coachman, and started in quest of a friend from the other side of the county. About an hour later, when luncheon was in full progress, and Rosamond was, by Cecil's languor, driven into doing the honours, with her most sunshiny drollery and mirth, Raymond's hand was on the carriage door, and he asked in haste, "Can you spare me a glass of champagne? Have you a scent bottle?"

"An accident?"

"Yes, no, not exactly. She has been knocked down and trampled on."

"Who? Let me come! Can't I help? Could Rosamond?"

"No, no. It is a poor woman, brutally treated. No, I say, I'll manage. It is a dreadful scene, don't."

But there was something in his tone which impelled Rosamond to open the carriage door and spring out.

"Rose, I say it is no place for a lady. I can't answer for it to Julius."

"I'll do that. Take me."

There was no withstanding her, and, after all, Raymond's tone betrayed that he was thankful for her help, and knew that there was no danger for her.

He had not many yards to lead her. The regions

of thoughtless gaiety were scarcely separated from the regions of undisguised evil, and Raymond on his way back from his friend, had fallen on a horrible row, in which a toy-selling woman had been set upon, thrown down and trodden on, and then dragged out by the police, bleeding and senseless. When he brought Rosamond to the spot, she was lying propped against a bundle, moaning a little, and guarded by a young policeman, who looked perplexed and only equal to keeping back the crowd, who otherwise, with better or worse purposes, would have rushed back in the few minutes during which Mr. Poynsett had been absent.

They fell back, staring and uttering expressions of rough wonder at the advance of the lady in her glistening silk, but as she knelt down by the poor creature held her on her arm, bathed her face with scent on her own handkerchief, and held to her lips the champagne that Raymond poured out, there was a kind of hoarse cheer.

"I think her arm is put out," said Rosamond; "she ought to go to the Infirmary."

"Send for a cab," said Raymond to the policeman; but at that moment the girl opened her eyes, started at the sight of him, and tried to hide her face with her hand.

"It is poor Fanny Reynolds," said he in a low voice to Rosamond, while the policeman was gruffly telling the woman she was better, and ought to get

up and not trouble the lady; but Rosamond waved off his too decided assistance, saying:

"I know who she is; she comes from my husband's parish; and I will take her home. You would like to go home, would you not, poor Fanny?"

The woman shuddered, but clung to her; and in a minute or two an unwilling fly had been pressed into the service, and the girl lifted into it by Raymond and the policeman.

"You are really going with her?" said the former. "You will judge whether to take her home; but she ought to go to the Infirmary first."

"Tell Cecil I am sorry to desert her," said Rosamond, as he wrung her hand, then paid the driver and gave him directions, the policeman going with them to clear the way through the throng to the border of the down.

The choice of the cabman had not been happy. He tried to go towards Backsworth, and when bidden to go to Wilsbro', growled out an imprecation, and dashed off at a pace that was evident agony to the poor patient; but when Rosamond stretched out at the window to remonstrate, she was answered with rude abuse that he could not be hindered all day by whims. She perceived that he was so much in liquor that their connection had better be as brief as possible; and the name on the door showed that he came from beyond the circle of influence of the name of Charnock Poynsett. She longed to assume the reins, if

not to lay the whip about his ears; but all she could do was to try to lessen the force of the jolts by holding up the girl, as the horse was savagely beaten, and the carriage so swayed from side to side that she began to think it would be well if there were not three cases for the Infirmary instead of one. To talk to the girl or learn her wishes was not possible, among the moans and cries caused by the motion; and it was no small relief to be safely at the Infirmary door, though there was no release till after a fierce altercation with the driver, who first denied and then laughed to scorn the ample fare he had received, so that had any policeman been at hand, the porter and house surgeon would have given him in charge, but they could only take his number and let him drive off in a fury.

Poor Fanny was carried away fainting to the accident ward, and Rosamond found it would be so long before she would be visible again, that it would be wiser to go home and send in her relations, but there was not a fly or cab left in Wilsbro', and there was nothing for it but to walk.

She found herself a good deal shaken, and walked fast because thus her limbs did not tremble so much, while the glaring September afternoon made her miss the parasol she had left in the carriage, and find little comfort in the shadeless erection on her head. It was much further than she had walked for a long time past, and she had begun to think she had parted

with a good deal of her strength before the Compton woods grew more defined, or the church tower came any nearer.

Though the lane to the Reynolds' colony was not full in her way, she was glad to sit down in the shade to speak to old Betty, who did not comport herself according to either extreme common to parents in literature.

"So Fanny, she be in the 'firmary, be her? I'm sure as 'twas very good of the young Squire and you, my lady; and I'm sorry her's bin and give you so much trouble."

Everybody was harvesting but the old woman, who had the inevitable bad leg. All men and beasts were either in the fields or at the races, and Rosamond, uncertain whether her patient was not in a dying state, rejoiced in her recent acquisition of a pony carriage, and speeding home with renewed energy, roused her "parson's man" from tea in his cottage, and ordered him off to take Betty Reynolds to see her daughter without loss of time.

Then at length she opened her own gate and walked in at the drawing-room window. Terry started up from the sofa, and Anne from a chair by his side, exclaiming at her appearance, and asking if there had been any accident.

"Not to any of us, but to a poor woman whom I have been taking to the Infirmary," she said, sinking into a low chair. "Where's Julius?"

"He went to see old George Willett," said Anne.

"The poor old man has just heard of the death of his daughter at Wilsbro'."

"And you came to sit with this boy, you good creature. How are you, master?"

"Oh, better, thanks," he said, with a weary stretch. "How done up you look, Rose! How did you come?"

"I walked from Wilsbro'."

"Walked!" echoed both her hearers.

"Walked! I liked my two legs better than the four of the horse that brought me there, though 'twasn't his fault, poor beast, but the brute of a driver, whom we'll have up before the magistrate. I've got the name; doing his best to dislocate every bone in the poor thing's body. Well, and I hope baby didn't disturb you?"

"Baby has been wonderfully quiet. Julius went to see after her once, but she was out."

"I'll go and see the young woman, and then come and tell my story."

But Rosamond came back almost instantly, exclaiming, "Emma must have taken the baby to the Hall. I wish she would be more careful. The sun is getting low, and there's a fog rising."

"She had not been there when I came down an hour ago," said Anne; "at least, not with Mrs. Poynsett. They may have had her in the housekeeper's room. I had better go and hasten her home."

Julius came in shortly after, but before he had heard the tale of Fanny Reynolds, Anne had returned to say that neither child nor nurse had been at the Hall, nor passed the large gate that morning. It was growing rather alarming. The other servants said Emma had taken the baby out as usual in the morning, but had not returned to dinner, and they too had supposed her at the Hall. None of the dependants of the Hall in the cottages round knew anything of her, but at last Dilemma Hornblower imparted that she had seen my lady's baby's green cloak atop of a tax-cart going towards Wilsbro'.

Now Emma had undesirable relations, and Rosamond had taken her in spite of warning that her uncle was the keeper of the "Three Pigeons." The young parents stood looking at one another, and Rosamond faintly said, "If that girl has taken her to the races!"

"I'm more afraid of that fever in Water Lane," said Julius. "I have a great mind to take the pony carriage and see that the girl does not take her there."

"Oh! I sent it with Betty Reynolds," cried Rosamond in an agony.

At that moment the Hall carriage came dashing up, and as Raymond saw the three standing in the road, he called to the coachman to stop, for he and his friend were now within, and Cecil leaning back, looking much tired. Raymond's eager question was what Rosamond had done with her charge.

"Left her at the Infirmary;—but, oh! you've not seen baby?"

"Seen—seen what! your baby?" asked Raymond, as if he thought Rosamond's senses astray, while his bachelor friend was ready to laugh at a young mother's alarms, all the more when Julius answered, "It is too true; the baby and her nurse have not been seen here since ten o'clock; and we are seriously afraid the girl may have been beguiled to those races. There is a report of the child's cloak having been seen on a tax-cart."

"Then it was so," exclaimed Cecil starting forward. "I saw a baby's mantle of that peculiar green, and it struck me that some farmer's wife had been aping little Julia's."

"Where? When?" cried Rosamond.

"They passed us, trying to find a place. I did not show it to you, for you were talking to those gentlemen."

"Did you see it, Brown?" asked Julius, going towards the coachman. "Our baby and nurse, I mean."

"I can't tell about Miss Charnock, sir," said the coachman, "but I did think I remarked two young females with young Gadley in a tax-cart. I would not be alarmed, sir, nor my lady," he added, with the freedom of a confidential servant, who, like all the household, adored Lady Rosamond. "It was a giddy thing in the young woman to have done; and no

place to take the young lady to. But there—there were more infants there than a man could count, and it stands to reason they come to no harm."

"The most sensible thing that has been said yet," muttered the friend; but Rosamond was by no means pacified. "Gadley's cart! They'll go to that horrid public-house in Water Lane where there's typhus and diphtheria and everything; and there's this fog—and that girl will never wrap her up. Oh! why did I ever go!"

"My dear Rose," said Julius, trying to speak with masculine composure, "this is nonsense. Depend upon it, Emma is only anxious to get her home."

"I don't know, I don't know! If she could take her to the races, she would be capable of taking her anywhere! They all go and drink at that beer-shop, and catch——Julius, the pony carriage! Oh! it's gone!"

"Yes," said Julius in explanation. "She sent Betty Reynolds into Wilsbro' in it."

"Get in, Rosamond," cried Cecil, "we will drive back till we find her."

But this was more than a good coachman could permit for his horses' sake, and Brown declared they must be fed and rested before the ball. Cecil was ready to give up the ball, but still they could not be taken back at once; and Rosamond had by this time turned as if setting her face to walk at once to the race-ground until she found her child, when Raymond said, "Rose! would you be afraid to trust to King

Coal and me? I would put him in at once and drive you till you find Julia."

"Oh! Raymond, how good you are!"

The coachman, glad of this solution, only waited to pick up Anne, and hurried on his horses, while the bachelor friend could not help grunting a little, and observing that it was plain there was only one child in the family, and that he would take any bet "it" was at home all right long before Poynsett reached the parsonage.

"May be so," said Raymond, "but I would do anything rather than leave her mother in the distress you take so easily."

"Besides, there's every chance of her being taken to that low public-house," said Cecil. "One that Mr. Poynsett would not allow our servants to go to during the bazaar, though it is close to the town-hall, and all the others did."

"Let us hope that early influence may prevent contamination," solemnly said the friend.

Cecil turned from him. "I still hope she may be at home," she said; "it is getting very chill and foggy. Raymond, I hope you may not have to go."

"You must lie down and get thoroughly rested," he said, as he helped her out; and only waiting to equip himself for the evening dance, he hurried to the stables to expedite the harnessing of the powerful and fiery steed which had as yet been only experimentally driven by himself and the coachman.

Rosamond was watching, and when King Coal was with difficulty pulled up, she made but one spring to the seat of the dog-cart; and Julius, who was tucking in the rug, had to leap back to save his foot, so instantaneous was the dash forward. They went like the wind, Rosamond not caring to speak, and Raymond had quite enough on his hands to be glad not to be required to talk, while he steered through the numerous vehicles they met, and she scanned them anxiously for the outline of Emma's hat. At last they reached Wilsbro', where, as they came to the entrance of Water Lane, Rosamond, through the hazy gaslight, declared that she saw a tax-cart at the door of the "Three Pigeons," and Raymond, albeit uncertain whether it were *the* tax-cart, could only turn down the lane at her bidding, with difficulty preventing King Coal from running his nose into the vehicle. Something like an infant's cry was heard through the open door, and before he knew what she was about, Rosamond was on the pavement and had rushed into the house; and while he was signing to a man to take the horse's head, she was out again, the gaslight catching her eyes so that they glared like a tigress's, her child in her arms, and a whole Babel of explaining tongues behind her. How she did it neither she nor Raymond ever knew, but in a second she had flown to her perch, saying hoarsely, "Drive me to Dr. Worth's. They were drugging her. I don't know whether I was in time. No, not a word"—(this to

those behind) — "never let me see any of you again."

King Coal prevented all further words of explanation by dancing round, so that Raymond was rejoiced at finding that nobody was run over. They were off again instantly, while Rosamond vehemently clasped the child, which was sobbing out a feeble sound, as if quite spent with crying, but without which the mother seemed dissatisfied, for she moved the poor little thing about if it ceased for a moment. They were soon within Dr. Worth's iron gates, where Raymond could give the horse to a servant, help his sister-in-law down, and speak for her; for at first she only held up the phial she had clutched, and gazed at the doctor speechlessly.

He looked well both at the bottle and the baby while Raymond spoke, and then said, "Are you sure she took any, Lady Rosamond?"

"Quite, quite sure!" cried Rosamond. "The spoon was at her lips, the dear little helpless darling!"

"Well, then," said the doctor, dryly, "it only remains to be proved whether an aristocratic baby can bear popular treatment. I dare say some hundred unlucky infants have been lugged out to the race-course to-day, and come back squalling their hearts out with fatigue and hunger, and I'll be bound that nine-tenths are lulled with this very sedative, and will be none the worse."

"Then you do not think it will hurt her?"

"So far from it, that, under the circumstances, it was the best thing she could have. She has plainly been exhausted, and though I would not exactly recommend the practice in your nursery, I doubt if she could have taken nourishment till she had been composed. She will sleep for an hour or two, and by that time you can get her home, and feed her as usual. I should be more anxious about Lady Rosamond herself," he added, turning to Raymond. "She looks completely worn out. Let me order you a basin of soup."

But Rosamond would not hear of it, she must get baby home directly. Raymond advised a fly, but it was recollected that none were attainable between the races and the ball, so the little one was muffled in shawls and cloaks almost to suffocation, and the doctor forced a glass of wine on her mother, and promised to look in the next day. Still they had a delay at the door, caused by the penitent Emma and her aunt, bent on telling how far they had been from intending any harm; how Emma, when carrying the baby out, had been over-persuaded by the cousins she had never disappointed before; how they had faithfully promised to take her home early, long before my lady's return; how she had taken baby's bottle, but how it had got broken; how impossible it had been to move off the ground in the throng; and how the poor baby's inconsolable cries had

caused the young nurse to turn aside to see whether her aunt could find anything to prevent her from screaming herself into convulsions.

Nothing but the most determined volubility on Mrs. Gadley's part could have poured this into the ears of Raymond; Rosamond either could not or would not heed, pushed forward, past the weeping Emma, and pulled away her dress with a shudder, when there was an attempt to draw her back and make her listen.

"Don't, girl," said Raymond. "Don't you see that Lady Rosamond can't attend to you? If you have anything to say, you must come another time. You've done quite enough mischief for the present."

"Yes," said the doctor, "tell your brother to put them both to bed, and keep them quiet. I should like to prescribe the same for you, Mr. Poynsett; you don't look the thing, and I suppose you are going to take the ball by way of remedy."

Raymond thanked the doctor, but was too much employed in enveloping his passengers to make further reply.

It was quite dark, and the fog had turned to misty rain, soft and still, but all pervading, and Rosamond found it impossible to hold up an umbrella as well as to guard the baby, who was the only passenger not soaked and dripping by the time they were among the lighted windows of the village.

"Oh, Raymond! Raymond!" she then said, in a husky, dreamy voice, "how good and kind you have

been. I know there was something that would make you very, very glad!"

"Is there?" he said. "I have not met with anything to make me glad for a long time past!"

"And I don't seem able to recollect what it was, or even if I ought to tell," said Rosamond, in the same faint, bewildered voice, which made Raymond very glad they were at the gate, where stood Julius.

But before Rosamond would descend into her husband's arms, she opened all her child's mufflings, saying, "Kiss her, kiss her, Raymond—how she shall love you!" And when he had obeyed, and Rosamond had handed the little one down to her father, she pressed her own wet cheek against his dripping beard and moustache, and exclaimed, "I'll never forget your goodness. Have you got her safe, Julius? I'll never, never go anywhere again!"

CHAPTER V.

THE PEBBLES.

" O no, no, no; 'tis true. Here, take this too;
It is a basilisk unto mine eye,
Kills me to look on't. Let there be no honour,
Where there is beauty; truth, where semblance; love,
Where there's another man."

Cymbeline.

WHEN Julius, according to custom, opened his study shutters, at half-past six, to a bright sunrise, his eldest brother stood before the window. "Well, how are they?" he said.

"All right, thank you; the child woke, had some food, and slept well and naturally after it; and Rose has been quite comfortable and at rest since midnight. You saved us from a great deal, Raymond."

"Ah!" with a sound of deep relief; "may Julia only turn out as sweet a piece of womanhood as her mother. Julius, I never understood half what that dear wife of yours was till yesterday."

"I was forced to cut our gratitude very short," said Julius, laying his hand on his brother's shoulder.

"You know I've always taken your kindness as a matter of course."

"I should think so," said Raymond, the more moved of the two. "I tell you, Julius, that Rosamond was to me the only redeeming element in the day. I wanted to know whether you could walk with me to ask after that poor girl; I hear she came home with her grandmother."

"Gladly," said Julius. "I ought to have gone last night; but what with Rose, and the baby, and Terry, I am afraid I forgot everything." He disappeared, and presently issued from the front door in his broad hat, while Raymond inquired for Terry.

"He is asleep now, but he has been very restless, and there is something about him I don't like. Did not Worth say he would come and look at the baby?"

"Yes, but chiefly to pacify Rosamond, about whom he was the most uneasy."

"She is quite herself now; but you look overdone, Raymond. Have you had any sleep?"

"I have not lain down. When we came home at four o'clock, Cecil was quite knocked up, excited and hysterical. Her maid advised me to leave her to her; so I took a bath, and came down to wait for you."

Julius would have liked to see the maid who could have soothed his Rosamond last night without him! He only said, however, "Is Frank come down? My mother rather expected him."

"Yes, he came to the race-ground."

"Indeed! He was not with you when you came back, or were we not sufficiently rational to see him?"

"Duncombe gave a dinner at the hotel, and carried him off to it. I'm mortally afraid there's something amiss in that quarter. What, didn't you know that Duncombe's filly failed?"

"No, indeed, I did not."

"The town was ringing with it. Beaten out-and-out by Fair Phyllida! a beast that took them all by surprise—nothing to look at—but causing, I fancy, a good deal of distress. They say the Duncombes will be done for. I only wish Frank was clear; but that unhappy engagement has thrown him in with Sir Harry's set, and he was with them all day—hardly spoke to me. To a fellow like him, a veteran scamp like old Vivian, with his benignant looks, is ten times more dangerous than men of his own age. However, having done the damage, they seem to have thrown him off. Miss Vivian would not speak to him at the ball."

"Eleonora! I don't know how to think it!"

"What you cannot *think*, a Vivian can *do* and does!" said Raymond, bitterly. "My belief is that he was decoyed into being fleeced by the father, and now they have done their worst, he is cast off. He came home with us, but sat outside, and I could not get a word out of him."

"I hope my mother may."

"If he be not too far gone for her. I always did expect some such termination, but not with this addition."

"I don't understand it now—Lena!"

"I only wonder at your surprise. The girl has been estranged from us all for a long time. If it is at an end, so much the better. I only wish we were none of us ever to see the face of one of them again."

Julius knew from his wife that there were hopes for Raymond, but of course he might not speak, and he was revolving these words, which had a vehemence unlike the wont of the speaker, when he was startled by Raymond's saying, "Julius, you were right. I have come to the conclusion that no consideration shall ever make me sanction races again."

"I am glad," began Julius.

"You would not be glad if you had seen all I saw yesterday. You must have lent me your eyes, for when you spoke before of the evils, I thought you had picked up a Utopian notion, and were running a-muck with it, like an enthusiastic young clergyman. For my own part I can't say I ever came across anything offensive. Of course I know where to find it, as one does wherever one goes, but there was no call to run after it; and as we were used to the affair, it was a mere matter of society——"

"No, it could never be any temptation to you," said Julius.

"No, nor to any other reasonable man; and I should add, though perhaps you might not allow it, that so long as a man keeps within his means, he has a right to enhance his excitement and amusement by bets."

"Umph! He has a right then to tempt others to their ruin, and create a class of speculators who live by gambling."

"You need not go on trying to demolish me. I was going to say that I had only thought of the demoralization, from the betting side; but yesterday, it was as if you had fascinated my eyes to look behind the scenes. I could not move a step without falling on something abominable. Roughs, with every passion up to fever-pitch, ferocity barely kept down by fear of the police, gambling everywhere, innocent young things looking on at coarseness as part of the humour of the day, foul language, swarms of vagabond creatures, whose trade is to minister to the licence of such occasions. I declare that your wife was the only being I saw display a spark of any sentiment human nature need not blush for!"

"Nay, Raymond, I begin to wonder whose is the exaggerated feeling now."

"You were not there," was the answer; and they were here interrupted by crossing the path of the policeman, evidently full of an official communication.

"I did not expect to see you so early, sir," he said.

"I was coming to the Hall to report to you after I had been in to the superintendent."

"What is it?"

"There has been a burglary at Mrs. Hornblower's, sir. If you please, sir," to Julius, "when is the Reverend Mr. Bowater expected home?"

"Not before Monday. Is anything of his taken?"

"Yes, sir. A glass case has been broken open, and a silver cup and oar, prizes for sports at college, I believe, have been abstracted. Also the money from the till below; and I am sorry to say, young Hornblower is absconded, and suspicion lies heavy on him. They do say the young man staked heavily on that mare of Captain Duncombe's."

"You had better go on to the superintendent now," said Raymond. "You can come to me for a summons if you can find any traces."

Poor Mrs. Hornblower, what horror for her! and poor Herbert too, who would acutely feel this ingratitude. The blackness of it was beyond what Julius thought probable in the lad, and the discussion of it occupied the brothers till they reached the Reynolds colony, where they were received by the daughter-in-law, a much more civilized person than old Betty.

After Fanny's dislocated arm had been set, the surgeon had sent her home in the Rectory carriage, saying there was so much fever in Wilsbro', that she would be likely to recover better at home; but she

had been suffering and feverish all night, and Dan Reynolds was now gone in quest of "Drake," for whom she had been calling all night.

"Is he her husband?" asked Julius.

"Well, I don't know, sir; leastways, Granny says he ought to be answerable for what's required."

Mrs. Reynolds further betrayed that the family had not been ignorant of Fanny's career since she had run away from home, leaving her child on her grandmother's hands. She had made her home in one of the yellow vans which circulate between fairs and races, driving an ostensible trade in cheap toys, but really existing by setting up games which were in fact, forms of gambling, according to the taste of the people and the toleration of the police. From time to time, she had appeared at home, late in the evening, with small sums of money and presents for her boy; and Mrs. Dan believed that she thought herself as good as married to "that there Drake." She was reported to be asleep, and the place "all of a caddle," and Julius promised to call later in the day.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Reynolds; "it would be a right good thing, poor girl. She've a kind heart, they all do say; not as I know, not coming here till she was gone, nor wanting to know much on her, for 'twas a right bad way she was in, and 'twere well if them nasty races were put down by Act of Parliament, for they be the very ruin of the girls in these parts."

"There's a new suggestion, Raymond," said Julius, as he shut the garden gate.

Raymond was long in answering, and when he spoke, it was to say, "I shall withdraw from the subscription to the Wilsbro' Cup."

"So much the better."

Then Raymond began discussing the terms of the letter in which he would state his reasons, but with an amount of excitement that made Julius say, "I should think it better not to write in this first heat. It will take more effect if it is not so visibly done on the spur of the moment."

But the usually deliberate Raymond exclaimed, "I cannot rest till it is done. I feel as if I must be like Lady Macbeth, continually washing my hands of all this wreck and ruin."

"No wonder; but I should think there was great need of caution—to use your own words."

"My seat must go, if this is to be the price," said Raymond. "I felt through all the speeches at that gilt-gingerbread place, that it was a monument of my truckling to expediency. We began the whole thing at the wrong end, and I fear we are beginning to see the effects."

"Do you mean that you are anxious about that fever in Water Lane?"

"There was an oppressive sickly air about everything, strongest at the ball. I can't forget it," said Raymond, taking off his hat, so that the morning air

might play about his temples. "We talked about meddling women, but the truth was that they were shaming us by doing what they could."

"I hope others will see it so. Is not Whitlock to be mayor next time?"

"Yes. He may do something. Well, they will hardly unseat me! I should not like to see Moy in my place, and it would be a sore thing for my mother; but," he continued, in the same strange, dreamy manner, "everything has turned out so wretchedly that I hardly know or care how it goes."

"My dear old fellow!"

Raymond had stopped to lean over a gate, where he could look up to the old red house in the green park, set in brightly-tinted trees, all aglow in the morning sunshine. Tears had sprung on his cheeks, and a suppressed sob heaved his chest. Julius ventured to say, "Perhaps there may yet be a change of mind."

"No!" was the answer. "In the present situation there is nothing for it but to sacrifice my last shred of peace to the one who has the chief right—in a certain way."

They walked on, and he hardly spoke again till, as they reached the Rectory, Julius persuaded him to come in and have a cup of tea; and though he said he must go back and see his friend off, he could not withstand the sight of Rosamond at the window, fresh and smiling, with her child in her arms.

"Not a bit the worse for her dissipation," she merrily said. "Oh, the naughty little thing!—to have begun with the Turf, and then the 'Three Pigeons!' Aren't you ashamed of her, papa? Sit down, Raymond; how horribly tired you do look."

"Ha! What's this?" exclaimed Julius, who had been opening the post-bag. "Here's a note from the Bishop, desiring me to come to the palace to-day, if possible."

"Oh!" cried Raymond. "What is there vacant—isn't there a canonry or a chaplaincy?"

"Or an archbishopric or two?" said Julius. "The pony can do it, I think, as there will be a long rest. If he seems fagged, I can put up at Backsworth and take a fly."

"You'll let James drive you," said Rosamond.

"I had rather not," said Julius. "It may be better to be alone."

"He is afraid of betraying his elevation to James," laughed Rosamond.

"Mrs. Daniel Reynolds to see you, sir."

This was with the information that that there trapesing chap, Drake, had fetched off poor Fanny in his van. He had been in trouble himself, having been in custody for some misdemeanor when she was thrown down; but as soon as he was released, he had come in search of her, and though at first he seemed willing to leave her to be nursed at home, he had no sooner heard of the visitors of that morning

than he had sworn he would have no parson meddling with his poor gal! she was good enough for him, and he would not have a pack of nonsense put in her head to set her against him.

"He's good to her, sir," said Mrs. Reynolds, "I think he be; but he is a very ignorant man. He tell'd us once as he was born in one of they vans, and had'nt never been to school nor nothin', nor heard tell of God, save in the way of bad words: he've done nothin' but go from one races and fairs to another, just like the gipsies, though he bain't a gipsy neither; but he's right down attacted to poor Fanny, and good to her."

"Another product of the system," said Raymond.

"Like the gleeman, whom we see through a picturesque medium," said Julius; "but who could not have been pleasant to the mediæval clergyman. I have hopes of poor Fanny yet. She will drift home one of these days, and we shall get hold of her."

"What a fellow you are for hoping!" returned Raymond, a little impatiently.

"Why not?" said Julius.

"Why? I should say——" replied Raymond, setting out to walk home, where he presided over his friend's breakfast and departure, and received a little banter over his solicitude for the precious infant. Cecil was still in bed, and Frank was looking ghastly, and moved and spoke like one in a dream. Raymond was relieved to hear him pleading with Susan for

admission to his mother's room much earlier than usual.

Susan took pity and let him in; when at once he flung himself into a chair, with his face hidden on the bed, and exclaimed, "Mother, it is all over with me!"

"My dear boy, what can have happened?"

"Mother, you remember those two red pebbles. Could you believe that she has sold hers?"

"Are you sure she has? I heard that they had a collection of such things from the lapidary at Rockpier."

"No, mother, that is no explanation. When I found that I should be able to come down, I sent a card to Lady Tyrrell, saying I would meet them on the race-ground—a post-card, so that Lena might see it. When I came there was no Lena, only some excuse about resting for the ball—lying down with a bad headache, and so forth—making it plain that I need not go on to Sirenwood. By and by there was some mild betting with the ladies, and Lady Tyrrell said, 'There's a chance for you, Bee; don't I see the very fellow to Conny's charm?" Whereupon that girl Conny pulled out the very stone I gave Lena three years ago at Rockpier. I asked; yes, I asked—Lena had sold it; Lena, at the bazaar; Lena, who——"

"Stay, Frank, is this trusting Lena as she bade you trust her? How do you know that there were no other such pebbles?"

"You have not seen her as I have done. There

has been a gradual alienation—holding aloof from us, and throwing herself into the arms of those Strangeways. It is no fault of her sister's. She has lamented it to me."

"Or pointed it out. Did she know the history of these pebbles?"

"No one did. Lena was above all reserved with her."

"Camilla Tyrrell knows a good deal more than she is told. Where's your pebble? You did not stake that?"

"Those who had one were welcome to the other."

"Oh, my poor foolish Frank! May it not be gone to tell the same tale of you that you think was told of her? Is this all?"

"Would that it were!"

"Well, go on, my dear. Was she at the ball?"

"Surrounded by all that set. I was long in getting near her, and then she said her card was full; and when I made some desperate entreaty, she said, in an undertone that stabbed me by its very calmness, 'After what has passed to-day, the less we meet the better.' And she moved away, so as to cut me off from another word."

"After what had passed! Was it the parting with the stone?"

"Not only. I got a few words with Lady Tyrrell. She told me that early impressions had given Lena a kind of fanatical horror of betting, and that she had

long ago made a sort of vow against a betting-man. Lady Tyrrell said she had laughed at it, but had no notion it was seriously meant; and I—I never even heard of it!"

"Nor are you a betting-man, my Frank."

"Ay? mother, you have not heard all."

"You are not in a scrape, my boy?"

"Yes, I am. You see I lost my head after the pebble transaction. I couldn't stand small talk, or bear to go near Raymond, so I got among some other fellows with Sir Harry——"

"And excitement and distress led you on?"

"I don't know what came over me. I could not stand still for fear I should feel. I must be mad on something. Then, that mare of Duncombe's, poor fellow, seemed a personal affair to us all; and Sir Harry, and a few other knowing old hands, went working one up, till betting higher and higher seemed the only way of supporting Duncombe, besides relieving one's feelings. I know it was being no end of a fool; but you haven't felt it, mother!"

"And Sir Harry took your bets?"

"One must fare and fare alike," said Frank.

"How much have you lost?"

"I've lost Lena, that's all I know," said the poor boy; but he produced his book, and the sum appalled him. "Mother," he said, in a broken voice, "there's no fear of its happening again. I can never feel like this again. I know it is the first time one of your

sons has served you so, and I can't even talk of sorrow, it seems all swallowed up in the other matter. But if you will help me to meet it, I will pay you back ten or twenty pounds every quarter."

"I think I can, Frankie. I had something in hand towards my own possible flitting. Here is the key of my desk. Bring me my banker's book and my cheque book."

"Mother! mother!" he cried, catching her hand and kissing it, "what a mother you are!"

"You understand," she said, "that it is because I believe you were not master of yourself, and that this is the exception, not the habit, that I am willing to do all I can for you."

"The habit! No, indeed! I never staked more than a box of gloves before; but what's the good, if she has made a vow against me?"

Mrs. Poynsett was silent for a few moments, then she said, "My poor boy, I believe you are both victims of a plot. I suspect that Camilla Tyrrell purposely let you see that pebble-token and be goaded into gambling, that she might have a story to tell her sister, when she had failed to shake her constancy and principle in any other way."

"Mother, that would make her out a fiend. She has been my good and candid friend all along. You don't know her."

"What would a friend have done by you yesterday?"

"She neither saw nor heard my madness. No,

mother, Lenore's heart has been going from me for months past, and she is glad of this plea for release, believing me unworthy. Oh! that stern face of hers! set like a head of Justice, with not a shade of pity—so beautiful—so terrible! It will never cease to haunt me."

He sat in deep despondency, while Mrs. Poynsett overlooked her resources; but presently he started up saying, "There's one shadow of a hope. I'll go over to Sirenwood, insist on seeing her and having an explanation. I have a right, whatever I did yesterday; and you have forgiven me for that, mother!"

"I think it is the most hopeful way. If you can see her without interposition, you will at least come to an understanding. Here, you had better take this cheque for Sir Harry."

When he was gone, she wondered whether she had been justified in encouraging him in defending Eleonora. Was this not too like another form of the treatment Raymond had experienced? Her heart bled for her boy, and she was ready to cry aloud, "Must that woman always be the destroyer of my sons' peace?"

When Frank returned, it was with a face that appalled her by its blank despair, as he again flung himself down beside her.

"She is gone," he said.

"Gone!"

"Gone, and with the Strangeways. I saw her."

"Spoke to her?"

"Oh no. The carriage turned the corner as I crossed the road. The two girls were there, and she——"

"Going with them to the station?"

"I thought so; I went to the house, meaning to leave my enclosure for Sir Harry and meet her on her way back; but I heard she was gone to stay with Lady Susan in Yorkshire. Sir Harry was not up, nor Lady Tyrrell."

Mrs. Poynsett's hope failed, though she was relieved that Camilla's tongue had not been in action. She was dismayed at the prone exhausted manner in which Frank lay, partly on the floor, partly against her couch, with his face hidden.

"Do you know where she is gone?"

"Yes, Revelrig, Cleveland, Yorkshire."

"I will write to her. Whatever may be her intentions, they shall not be carried out under any misrepresentation that I can contradict. You have been a foolish fellow, Frankie; but you shall not be painted worse than you are. She owes you an explanation, and I will do my best that you shall have it. My dear, what is the matter?"

She rang her bell hastily, and upheld the sinking head till help came. He had not lost consciousness, and called it giddiness, and he was convicted of having never gone to bed last night, and having eaten nothing that morning; but he turned against the wine and soup with which they tried to dose him, and, looking

crushed and bewildered, said he would go and lie down in his own room.

Raymond went up with him, and returned saying he only wanted to be alone, with his face from the light; and Mrs. Poynsett, gazing at her eldest son, thought he looked as ill and sunken as his younger brother.

CHAPTER VI.

A STICKIT MINISTER.

"And the boy not out of him."
TENNYSON'S *Queen Mary*.

JULIUS had only too well divined the cause of his summons. He found Herbert Bowater's papers on the table before the Bishop, and there was no denying that they showed a declension since last year, and that though, from men without his advantages, they would have been passable, yet from him they were evidences of neglect of study and thought. Nor could the cause be ignored by anyone who had kept an eye on the cricket reports in the county paper; but Herbert was such a nice, hearty, innocent fellow, and his father was so much respected, that it was with great reluctance that his rejection was decided on, and his Rector had been sent for in case there should be any cause for extenuation.

Julius could not say there was. He was greatly grieved and personally ashamed, but he could plead nothing but his own failure to influence the young

man enough to keep him out of a rage for amusement, of which the quantity, not the quality, was the evil. So poor Herbert was sent for to hear his fate, and came back looking stunned. He hardly spoke till they were in the fly that Julius had brought from Backsworth, and then the untamed schoolboy broke forth, "What are you doing with me? I say, I can't go back to Compton like a dog in a string."

"Where will you go?"

"I don't care. To Jericho at once, out of the way of everyone. I tell you what, Rector, it was the most ridiculous examination I ever went up for, and I'm not the only man that says so. There was Rivers, of St. Mary's at Backsworth,—he says the questions were perfectly unreasonable, and what no one could be prepared for. This fellow Danvers is a new hand, and they are always worst, setting one a lot of subjects of no possible use but to catch one out. I should like to ask him now what living soul at Compton he expects to be the better for my views on the right reading of——"

Julius interrupted the passionate tones at the lodge by saying, "If you wish to go to Jericho, you must give directions."

Herbert gave something between a laugh and a growl.

"I left the pony at Backsworth. Will you come with me to Strawyers and wait in the park till I send Jenny out to you?"

"No, I say. I know my father will be in a greater rage than he ever was in his life, and I won't go sneaking about. I'd like to go to London, to some hole where no one would ever hear of me. If I were not in Orders already, I'd be off to the ivory-hunters in Africa, and never be heard of more. If this was to be, I wish they had found it out a year ago, and then I should not have been bound," continued the poor young fellow, in his simplicity, thinking his thoughts aloud, and his sweet candid nature beginning to recover its balance. "Now I'm the most wretched fellow going. I know what I've undertaken. It's not your fault, nor poor Joanna's. You've all been at me, but it only made me worse. What could my father be thinking of to make a parson of a fellow like me? Well, I must face it out sooner or later at Compton, and I had better do it there than at home, even if my father would have me."

"I must go to Strawyers. The Bishop gave me a letter for your father, and I think it will break it a little for your mother. Would you wait for me at Rood House? You could go into the chapel, and if they wish for you, I could return and fetch you."

Herbert caught at this as a relief, and orders were given accordingly. It seemed a cruel moment to tell him of young Hornblower's evasion and robbery, but the police wanted the description of the articles; and, in fact, nothing would have so brought home to him that, though Compton might not appreciate

minutiæ of Greek criticism, yet the habit of diligence, of which it was the test, might make a difference there. The lingering self-justification was swept away by the sense of the harm his pleasure-seeking had done to the lad whom he had once influenced. He had been fond and proud of his trophies, but he scarcely wasted a thought on them, so absorbed was he in the thought of how he had lorded it over the youth with that late rebuke. The blame he had refused to take on himself then came full upon him now, and he reproached himself too much to be angered at the treachery and ingratitude.

"I can't prosecute," he said, when Julius asked for the description he had promised to procure.

"We must judge whether it would be true kindness to refrain, if he is captured," said Julius. "I had not time to see his mother, but Rosamond will do what she can for her, poor woman."

"How shall I meet her?" sighed Herbert; and so they arrived at the tranquil little hospital and passed under the deep archway into the grey quadrangle, bright with autumn flowers, and so to the chapel. As they advanced up the solemn and beautiful aisle Herbert dropped on his knees with his hands over his face. Julius knelt beside him for a moment, laid his hand on the curly brown hair, whispered a prayer and a blessing, and then left him; but ere reaching the door, the low choked sobs of anguish of heart could be heard.

A few steps more, and in the broad walk along the quadrangle, Julius met the frail bowed figure with his saintly face, that seemed to have come out of some sacred bygone age.

Julius told his errand. "If you could have seen him just now," he said, "you would see how much more hope there is of him than of many who never technically fail, but have not the same tender, generous heart, and free humility."

"Yes, many a priest might now be thankful if some check had come on him."

"And if he had met it with this freedom from bitterness. And it would be a great kindness to keep him here a day or two. Apart from being with you, the showing himself at Compton or at Strawyers on Sunday would be hard on him."

"I will ask him. I will gladly have him here as long as the quiet may be good for him. My nephew, William, will be here till the end of the Long Vacation, but I must go to St. Faith's on Monday to conduct the retreat."

"I leave him in your hands then, and will call as I return to see what is settled, and report what his family wish. I grieve more for them than for himself."

Julius first encountered Jenny Bowater in the village making farewell calls. He stopped the carriage and joined her, and not a word was needed to tell her that something was amiss. "You have come to tell us something," she said. "Herbert has failed?"

"Prayers are sometimes answered as we do not expect," said Julius. "I believe it will be the making of him."

"Oh, but how will mamma ever bear it!" cried Jenny.

"We must remind her that it is only a matter of delay, not rejection," said Julius.

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes, the Bishop sent for me, and asked me to see your father. It was partly from slips in critical knowledge, which betrayed the want of study, and the general want of thought and progress, and all the rest of it, in his papers——"

"Just the fact——"

"Yes, which a man of less reality and more superficial quickness might have concealed by mere intellectual answers, though it might have been much worse for him in the end."

"Where is he?"

"At Rood House. Unless your mother wishes for him here, he had better stay there till he can bear to come among us again."

"Much better, indeed," said Jenny. "I only hope papa and mamma will see how good it is for him to be there. O Julius, if he is taking it in such a spirit, I can think it all right for him; but for them—for them, it is very hard to bear. Nothing ever went wrong with the boys before, and Herbert—mamma's darling!" Her eyes were full of tears.

"I wish he had had a better rector," said Julius.

"No, don't say that. It was not your fault."

"I cannot tell. An older man, or more truly a holier man, might have had more influence. We were all in a sort of *laissez-aller* state this autumn, and now comes the reckoning."

"There's papa," said Jenny. "Had you rather go to him alone, or can I do any good?"

"I think I will go alone," said Julius.

Mr. Bowater, who had grown up in a day when examinations were much less earnest matters, never guessed what brought Julius over, but simply thought he had come to wish them good-bye; then believed in any accident rather than in failure, and finally was exceedingly angry, and stormed hotly, first at examinations and modern Bishops, then at cricket and fine ladies, then at Julius, for not having looked after the lad better, and when this was meekly accepted, indignation took a juster direction, and Herbert's folly and idleness were severely lashed, more severely than Julius thought they quite deserved, but a word of pleading only made it worse. Have him home to take leave? No, indeed, Mr. Bowater hoped he knew his duty better as father of a family, when a young man had publicly disgraced himself. "I'll tell you what, Julius Charnock, if you wish him to forget all the little impression it may have made, and be ready to run after any amount of folly, you'd make me have him home to be petted and cried over by his mother

and sisters. He has been their spoilt pet too long, and I won't have him spoilt now. I'll not see him till he has worked enough to show whether there's any real stuff in him."

Mr. Bowater never even asked where his son was, probably taking it for granted that he was gone back to Compton; nor did Julius see Jenny again, as she was trying to comfort her mother under the dreadful certainty that poor dear Herbert was most cruelly treated, and that the examining chaplain came of a bad stock, and always had had a dislike to the family. It was to be hoped that Mr. Bowater would keep to his wise resolution, and not send for Herbert, for nothing could be worse for him than the sympathy he would have met with from her.

What with looking in to report at Rood House and finding Herbert most grateful for leave to remain there for a few days, Julius did not reach home till long after dark. Pleasantly did the light greet him from the open doorway where his Rosamond was standing. She sprang at once into his arms as if he had been absent a month, and cried, "Here you are safe at last!" Then, as she pulled off his wraps, "How tired you must be. Have you had any food? No—it's all ready;" and he could see "high tea" spread, and lighted by the first fire of the season. "Come and begin!"

"What, without washing my hands?"

"You are to do that in the study; it is all ready."

He did not exactly see why he should be too tired to mount to his dressing-room; but he obeyed, not ungratefully, and his chair was ready, his plate heaped with partridge and his tumbler filled with ale almost before his eyes had recovered the glare of light. The eagerness and flutter of Rosamond's manner began to make him anxious, and he began for the third time the inquiries she had always cut short—"Baby all right? Terry better?"

"Baby—oh yes, a greater duck than ever. I put her to bed myself, and she was quite delicious. Eat, I say; go on."

"Not unless you eat that other wing."

"I'll help myself then. You go on. I don't see Herbert, so I suppose it is all right. Where's your canonry?"

"Alas! poor Herbert is plucked. I had to go round by Strawyers to tell them."

"Plucked! I never heard of such a thing. I think it is a great shame such a nice honest fellow should be so ill-used, and when all his pretty things have been stolen too! Do you know, they've taken up young Hornblower; but his friends have made off with the things, and they say they are in the melting-pot by this time, and there's no chance of recovering them."

"I don't think he cares much now, poor fellow. Did you see Mrs. Hornblower?"

"No; by the time I could get my hat on she had heard it, poor thing, and was gone to Backsworth

for he's there, in the county gaol; was taken at the station, I believe; I don't half understand it."

Her manner was indeed strange and flighty; and though she recurred to questions about the Ordination and the Bowaters, Julius perceived that she was forcing her attention to the answers as if trying to stave off his inquiries, and he came to closer quarters. "How is Terry? Has Dr. Worth been here?"

"Yes; but not till very late. He says he never was so busy."

"Rosamond, what is it? What did he say of Terry?"

"He said"—she drew a long breath—"he says it is the Water Lane fever."

"Terry, my dear——"

She held him down with a hand on his shoulder—

"Be quiet. Finish your dinner. Dr. Worth said the great point was to keep strong, and not be overdone, nor to go into infected air tired and hungry. I would not have let you come in if there had been any help for it; and now I'll not have you go near him till you've made a good meal."

"You must do the same then. There, eat that slice, or I won't;" and as she allowed him to place it on her plate, "What does he call it—not typhus?"

"He can't tell yet; he does not know whether it is infectious or only epidemic; and when he heard how the dear boy had been for days past at the Exhibition at the Town-hall, and drinking lots of iced water on Saturday, he seemed to think it quite

accounted for. He says there is no reason that in this good air he should not do very well; but, oh, Julius, I wish I had kept him from that horrid place. They left him in my charge!"

"There is no reason to distress yourself about that, my Rose. He was innocently occupied, and there was no cause to expect harm. There's all good hope for him, with God's blessing. Who is with him now?"

"Cook is there now. Both the maids were so kind and hearty, declaring they would do anything, and were not afraid; and I can manage very well with their help. You know papa had a low fever at Montreal, and mamma and I nursed him through it, so I know pretty well what to do."

"But how about the baby?"

"Emma came back before the doctor came, crying piteously, poor child, as if she had had a sufficient lesson; so I said she might stay her month on her good behaviour, and now we could not send her out of the house. I have brought the nursery down to the spare room, and in the large attic, with plenty of disinfecting fluid, we can, as the doctor said, isolate the fever. He is quiet and sleepy, and I do not think it will be hard to manage, if you will only be good and conformable."

"I don't promise, if that means that you are to do everything and I nothing. When did Worth see him?"

"Not till five o'clock; and he would not have come at all, if Anne had not sent in some one from the Hall when she saw how anxious I was. He would not have come otherwise; he is so horribly busy, with lots of cases at Wilsboro'. Now, if you have done, you may come and see my boy."

Julius did see a flushed sleeping face that did not waken at his entrance; and as his wife settled herself for her watch, he felt as if he could not leave her after such a day as she had had, but an indefinable apprehension made him ask whether she would spare him to run up to the Hall to see his mother and ask after Raymond, whose looks had haunted him all day. She saw he would not rest otherwise, and did not show how unwilling was her consent, for though she knew little, her mind misgave her.

He made his way into the Hall by the back door, and found his mother still in the drawing-room, and Raymond dozing in the large arm-chair by the fire. Mrs. Poynsett gave a warning look as Julius bent over her, but Raymond only opened his eyes with a dreamy gaze, without speaking.

"Why, mother, where are the rest?"

"Poor Frank—I hope it is only the shock and fatigue; but Dr. Worth wished him to be kept as quiet as possible. He can't bear to see anyone in the room, so that good Anne said she would sit in Charlie's room close by."

"Then he is really ill?" said Julius.

"He nearly fainted after walking over to Sirenwood in vain. I don't understand it. There's something very wrong there, which seems perfectly to have crushed him."

"I'll go up and see him," said Julius. "You both of you look as if you ought to be in bed. How is Cecil, Raymond?"

"Quite knocked up," he sleepily answered. "Here's Susan, mother."

Susan must have been waiting till she heard voices to carry off her mistress. Raymond pushed her chair into her room, bent over her with extra tenderness, bade her good-night; and when Julius had done the same they stood by the drawing-room fire together.

"I've been trying to write that letter, Julius," said Raymond, "but I never was so sleepy in my life, and I can't get on with it."

"What letter?"

"That letter. About the races."

"Oh! That seems long ago!"

"So it does," said Raymond, in the same dreamy manner, as if trying to shake something off. "Some years, isn't it? I wanted it done, somehow. I would sit down to it now, only I have fallen asleep a dozen times over it already."

"Not very good for composition," said Julius, alarmed by something indefinable in his brother's look, and by his manner of insisting on what was

by no means urgent. "Come, put it out of your head, and go to bed."

"How did you find the boy Terry?" asked Raymond, again as if in his sleep.

"I scarcely saw him. He was asleep."

"And Worth calls it——?"

"The same fever as in Water Lane."

"I thought so. We are in for it," said Raymond, now quite awake. "He did not choose to say so to my mother, but I gathered it from his orders."

"But Frank only came down yesterday."

"Frank was knocked down and predisposed by the treatment he met with, poor boy. They say he drank quarts of iced things at the dinner and ball, and ate nothing. This may be only the effect of the shock, but his head is burning, and there is a disposition to wander. However, he has had his *coup de grâce*, and that may account for it. It is Cecil."

"Cecil!"

"Cecil, poor child. She has been constantly in that pestiferous place. All Worth would say was that she must be kept quiet and cool, but he has sent the same draughts for all three. I saw, for Terry's came here. I fancy Worth spoke out plainly to that maid of Cecil's, Grindstone; but she only looks bitter at me, says she can attend to her mistress, and has kept me out of the room all day. But I will go in to-night before I go to bed," added Raymond energetically; "you are ready

to laugh at me, Julius. No one has meddled between you and Rosamond."

"Thank God, no!" cried Julius.

"Friend abroad, or you may leave out the *r*," said Raymond, "maid at home. What chance have I ever had?"

"I'll tell you what I should do, Raymond," said Julius, "turn out the maid, keep the field, nurse her myself."

"Yes," said Raymond, "that's all very well if—if you haven't got the fever yourself. There, you need say nothing about it, nobody would be of any use to me to-night, and it may be only that I am dead beat."

But there was something about his eyes and his heavy breath which confirmed his words, and Julius could only say "My dear Raymond!"

"It serves us right, does not it?" said his brother smiling. "I only wish it had not fixed on the one person who tried to do good."

"If I could only stay with you; but I must tell Rosamond first."

"No indeed. I want no one to-night, no one; after that you'll look after my mother, that's the great thing." He spoke steadily, but his hand trembled so that he could not light his candle, and Julius was obliged to do it, saying wistfully, "I'll come up the first thing in the morning and see how you are."

"Do, and if there is need, you will tell my mother.

A night's rest may set me right, but I have not felt well these three or four days—I shall be in my own old room."

He leant heavily on the balusters, but would not take his brother's arm. He passed into his dressing-room, and thus to the open door of the room where he heard his wife's voice; and as Mrs. Grindstone came forward to warn him off, he said "She is awake."

"Yes, sir, but she must not be excited."

"Raymond!"

"How are you now?" he asked, coming up to the bed.

"Oh! it is very hot and heavy," said Cecil wearily, putting her hand into his, "I am aching all over."

"Poor child!" he said softly.

She lifted her eyes to his face. "I wanted to tell you all day," she said. "Didn't you come to the door?"

"Many times, my dear."

"And now! oh dear! I don't recollect. Don't go, please."

He sat down by her, she held his hand and dozed again.

"You had best leave her now, sir," said the maid; "she will only go on in this way, and I can tend her."

He would have given a great deal to have been sure that he could hold up his head ten minutes longer and to venture to send the woman away. Cecil muttered "Stay," and he sat on till her sleep seemed deeper,

and he felt as if a few moments more might disable him from crossing the room, but his first movement again made her say "Don't."

"Mr. Poynsett cannot stay, ma'am," said Grindstone, in a persuasive tone. "He is very tired, and not well, and you would not wish to keep him."

"Give me a kiss," she said, like a tired child.

It was not like the shy embrace with which they had sometimes met and parted, but he knew he must not rouse her, and only said very low, "Good-night, my poor dear; God bless you, and grant us a happy meeting, whenever it is."

Tears were flowing down his cheeks when Julius presently came to him again, and only left him when settled for the night.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WATER LANE FEVER.

THE Water Lane fever. People called it so as blinking its real name, but it was not the less true that it was a very pestilence in the lower parts of Wilsbro'; and was prostrating its victims far and wide among the gentry who had resorted to the town-hall within the last few weeks.

Cases had long been smouldering among the poor and the workmen employed, and several of these were terminating fatally just as the outbreak was becoming decisive.

On Monday morning Julius returned from visits to his brothers to find a piteous note from Mrs. Fuller entreating him to undertake two funerals. Her husband had broken down on Sunday morning and was very ill, and Mr. Driver had merely read the services and then joined his pupils, whom he had sent away to the sea-side. He had never been responsible for pastoral care, and in justice to them could not undertake it now. "Those streets are in a dreadful

state," wrote the poor lady, "several people dying; and there is such a panic in the neighbourhood that we know not where to turn for help. If you could fix an hour we would let the people know. The doctor insists on the funerals being immediate."

Julius was standing in the porch reading this letter, and thinking what hour he could best spare from nearer claims, when he heard the gate swing and beheld his junior curate with a very subdued and sobered face, asking "Is it true?"

"That the fever is here? Yes, it is."

"And very bad?"

"Poor Frank is our worst case as yet. He is constantly delirious. The others are generally sensible, except that Terry is dreadfully haunted with mathematics."

"Then it is all true about the Hall. Anyone else ill?"

"Only the two Willses. They were carousing at the 'Three Pigeons.' I hope that Raymond's prohibition against that place may have been the saving of the Hall servants. See here," and he gave the note.

"I had better take those two funerals. I can at least do that," said Herbert. "That Driver must be a regular case of a hireling."

"He never professed that the sheep were his," said Julius.

"Then I'll go to the Vicarage and get a list of the sick, and see after them as far as I can," said Herbert, in a grave, humble tone, showing better than a thousand

words how he felt the deprivation he had brought on himself; and as to shame or self-consciousness, the need had swallowed them all.

"It will be a great act of kindness, Herbert. The point of infection does not seem clear yet, but I am afraid it will be a serious outbreak."

"I did not believe it could all be true when the report came to Rood House, but of course I came to hear the truth and see what I could do. How is Mrs. Poynsett bearing up?"

"Bravely. Anne contrived our carrying her upstairs, and it is the greatest comfort to Raymond to lie and look at her, and Susan looks after them both."

"Then he can't be so very ill."

"Not so acutely, but there are symptoms that make Worth anxious. Shall I give you a note for Mrs. Fuller?"

"Do, and put me at your disposal for all you can spare for, or I can do. Have you written to Bindon?"

"I don't know where, within some hundred miles. But, Herbert, I think we ought to undertake the help that is wanted at Wilsbro'. Smith of Duddingstone is too weakly, and poor old Mr. Moulden neither could nor would. We are the nearest, and having it here already, do not run the risk of spreading it. As things are, I cannot be very long away from home, but I would come in for an hour or so every day, if you could do the rest."

"Yes, that was what I meant," said Herbert.

"Worth says the best protection is never to go among the sick hungry or exhausted. He says he keeps a biscuit in his pocket to eat before going into a sick house. I shall make Rosamond keep you supplied, and you must promise to use them."

"Oh yes, I promise."

"And never drink anything there. There is to be a public meeting to-morrow, to see whether the cause of this outbreak is not traceable to the water down there."

"Mrs. Duncombe's meddling?"

"Don't judge without evidence. But it does seem as if the water of the well at Pettitt's houses had done much of the harm. Terry was drinking it all that hot day, and to-day we hear that Lady Tyrrell and two of the servants are ill, besides poor little Joe Reynolds."

"It is very terrible," said Herbert. "Lady Tyrrell, did you say?"

"Yes. She was there constantly, like Raymond's wife. Happily there is not much fear for your people, Herbert. Your father was at the dinner, but he is not a water drinker, and Jenny only just came to the bazaar, that was all. Edith happily gave up the ball."

"I know," said Herbert, colouring. "Jenny persuaded her to give it up because of—me. Oh, how I have served them all!"

"I told Jenny that perhaps her Ember prayers had been met in the true way."

"Yes," said Herbert. "I can't understand now how I could have been such an audacious fool as to present myself so coolly after the year I had spent. God forgive me for it! Rector, thank you for leaving me at Rood House. It was like having one's eyes opened to a new life. I say, do you know anything about Harry Hornblower? Is he come home?"

"Yes. You wouldn't prosecute?"

"Happily I couldn't. The things were gone and could not be identified, and there was nothing about him. So, though they had me over to Backsworth, they could not fall foul of me for refusing to prosecute. Have you seen him?"

"No, I tried, but he had got out of my way. You've not been there?" seeing that Herbert had brought back his bag.

"No; I will not till I come back;" and as he took the note he added, "Rector, I do beg your pardon with all my might." Then, after a strong clasp of the hand, he sped away with a long, manful, energetic stride, which made Julius contrast his volunteer courage with the flight of the man who, if not pledged to pastoral care at Wilsbro', still had priestly vows upon him.

Julius had no scruples about risking this favourite home child. If he thought about it at all, it was to rejoice that Mrs. Bowater was safely gone, for he had

passed unscathed through scenes at St. Awdry's that would have made his mother tremble, and he had little fear of contagion with reasonable care. Of course the doctors had the usual debate whether the fever were infectious or epidemic, but it made little difference. The local ones, as well as an authority from London, had an inspection previous to the meeting, which took place in the school, whose scholars were dispersed in the panic. No ladies were admitted. "We have had enough of them," quoted Worshipful Mayor Truelove. Mr. Briggs, the ex-mayor, was at the bedside of his son, and there were hardly enough present to make decisions.

The focus of the disease was in Pettitt's well. The water, though cold, clear, and sparkling, was affected by noxious gases from the drains, and had become little better than poison; the air was not much better, and as several neighbouring houses, some swarming with lodgers, used this water, the evil was accounted for. The "Three Pigeons" had been an attraction to the servants waiting with their ladies' carriages during the entertainments, and though they had not meddled much with the simple element, spirits had not neutralized the mischief. Thence too had come water for the tea and iced beverages used at the bazaar and ball. Odours there had been in plenty from the untouched drainage of the other houses, and these, no doubt, enhanced the evil; but everyone agreed that the bad management of the drains on Mr.

Pettitt's property had been the main agency in the present outbreak.

The poor little perfumer had tears of grief and indignation in his eyes, but he defended his cause and shielded the ladies with chivalry worthy of his French ancestry. He said he had striven to do his duty as a proprietor, and if other gentlemen had done the same, and the channels could have had a free outlet, this misfortune would never have occurred. He found himself backed up by Mr. Julius Charnock, who rose to declare that what Mr. Pettitt had said was just what his brother, Mr. Charnock Poynsett, had desired should be stated as his own opinion, namely, that the responsibility rested, not with those who had done all within their power or knowledge for the welfare of their tenants, but with those whose indifference on the score of health had led them to neglect all sanitary measures. "He desires me to say," added Julius, "that being concerned both in the neglect and in the unfortunate consequences, he is desirous to impress his opinion on all concerned."

Future prevention was no longer in the hands of the Town Council, for a sanitary commission would take that in hand; but in the meantime it was a time of plague and sickness, and measures must be taken for the general relief. Mr. Moy, to whom most of the houses belonged, was inquired for; but it appeared that he had carried off his wife and daughter on Saturday in terror when one of his servants had

fallen ill, and even his clerks would not know where to write to him till he should telegraph. The man Gadley was meantime driving an active trade at the "Three Pigeons," whither the poor, possessed with the notion that spirits kept out the infection, were resorting more than ever, and he set at defiance all the preventives which doctors, overseer, and relieving officer were trying to enforce, with sullen oaths against interference.

Two deaths yesterday, one to-day, three hourly apprehended; doctors incessantly occupied, nurses, however unfit, not to be procured by any exertion of the half-maddened relieving-officer; breadwinners prostrated; food, wine, bedding, everything lacking. Such was the state of things around the new town-hall of Wilsbro', and the gentry around were absorbed by cases of the same epidemic in their own families.

To telegraph for nurses from a hospital, to set on foot a subscription, appoint a committee of management, and name a treasurer and dispenser of supplies, were the most urgent steps. Julius suggested applying to a Nursing Sisterhood, but Mr. Truelove, without imputing any motives to the reverend gentleman, was unwilling to insert the thin end of the wedge; so the telegram was sent to a London hospital, and Mr. Whitlock, the mayor-elect, undertook to be treasurer, and to print and circulate an appeal for supplies of all sorts. Those present resolved themselves into a committee, and consulted about a fever hospital,

since people could hardly be expected to recover in the present condition of Water Lane; but nothing was at present ready, and the question was adjourned to the next day.

As Julius parted with Mr. Whitlock he met Herbert Bowater returning from the cemetery in search of him, with tidings of some cases where he was especially needed. As they walked on together Mrs. Duncombe overtook them with a basket on her arm. She held out her hand with an imploring gesture.

"Mr. Charnock, it can't be true, can it?—they only say so out of ignorance—that it was Pettitt's well, I mean?"

In a few words Julius made it clear what the evil had been and how it arose.

She did not dispute it, she merely grew sallower and said:

"God forgive us! We did it for the best. I planned. I never thought of that. Oh!"

"My brother insists that the mischief came of not following the example you set."

"And Cecil?"

"Cecil is too much stupefied to know anything about it."

"You are helping here? Make me all the use you can. Whatever has to be done give it to me."

"Nay, you have your family to consider."

"My boys are at their grandmother's. My husband

is gone abroad. Give me work. I have brought some wine. Who needs it most?"

"Wine?" said Herbert. "Here? I was going back for some, but half an hour may make all the difference to the poor lad in here."

Mrs. Duncombe was within the door in a moment.

"There has been an execution in her house," said Herbert, as they went home. "That fellow went off on Saturday, and left her alone to face it."

"I thought she had striven to keep out of debt."

"What can a woman do when a man chooses to borrow? That horse brought them to more unexpected smash. They say that after the ball, where she appeared in all her glory, as if nothing had happened, she made Bob give her a schedule of his debts, packed his portmanteau, sent him off to find some cheap hole abroad, and stayed to pick up the pieces after the wreck."

"She is a brave woman," said Julius.

Therewith they plunged into the abodes of misery, where the only other helper at present was good old Miss Slater, who was going from one to another, trying to show helpless women how to nurse, but able only to contribute infinitesimal grains of aid or comfort at immense cost to herself. Julius insisted on taking home with him his curate, who had been at work from ten o'clock that morning till six, when as Julius resigned the pony's reins to him, he begged that they might go round and inquire at Sirenwood,

to which consent was the more willingly given because poor Frank's few gleams of consciousness were spent in sending his indefatigable nurse Anne to ask whether his mother had "had that letter," and in his delirium he was always feeling his watch-chain for that unhappy pebble, and moaning when he missed it. Mrs. Poynsett's letter had gone on Friday, and still there was no answer, and this was a vexation, adding to the fear that the poor fellow's rejection had been final. Yet she might have missed the letter by being summoned home. Close to the lodge, they overtook Sir Harry, riding dejectedly homewards, and, glad to be saved going up to the house, they stopped and inquired for Lady Tyrrell.

"Very low and oppressed," he said. "M'Vie does not give us reason to expect a change just yet. Do they tell you the same? Worth attends you, I think?"

"He seems to think it must run on for at least three weeks," said Julius.

"You've been to the meeting, eh? Was it that well of Pettitt's? Really that meddling wife of Duncombe's ought to be prosecuted. I hope she'll catch the fever and be served out."

"She tried to prevent it," said Julius.

"Pshaw! women have no business with such things, they only put their foot in it. Nobody used to trouble themselves about drains, and one never heard of fevers."

Instead of contesting the point, Julius asked whether Miss Vivian were at home.

"No; that's the odd thing. I wrote, for M'Vie has no fear of infection, and poor Camilla is always calling for her, and that French maid has thought proper to fall ill, and we don't know what to do. Upper housemaid cut and run in a panic, cook dead drunk last night, not a servant in the house to be trusted. If it were not for my man Victor, I don't know where I should be. Very odd what that child is about. Lady Susan can't be keeping it from her. Unjustifiable!"

"She is with Lady Susan Strangeways?"

"Yes. Went with Bee and Conny. I was glad for we can't afford to despise a good match, though I *was* sorry for your brother."

"Do I understand you that she is engaged to Mr. Strangeways?"

"No, no; not yet. One always hears those things before they are true, and you see they are keeping her from us as if she belonged to them already. I call it unfeeling; I have just been to the post to see if there's a letter! Can't be anything wrong in the address,—Revelrig, Cleveland, Yorkshire."

"Why don't you telegraph?"

"I shall, if I don't hear to-morrow morning."

But the morning's telegrams were baffling. None came in answer to Sir Harry, though he had bidden his daughter to telegraph back instantly; and two

hospitals replied that they had no nurses to spare! This was the first thing Julius heard when he came to the committee-room. The second was that the only parish nurse had been found asleep under the influence of the port-wine intended for her patients, the third that there were five more deaths, one being Mrs. Gadley, of the "Three Pigeons," from diphtheria, and fourteen more cases of fever were reported. Julius had already been with the schoolmistress, who was not expected to live through the day. He had found that Mrs. Duncombe had been up all night with one of the most miserable families, and only when her unpractised hands had cared for a little corpse, had been forced home by good Miss Slater for a little rest. He had also seen poor Mr. Fuller, who was too weak and wretched to say anything more than "God help us, Charnock; you will do what you can;" and when Julius asked for his sanction to sending for Sisters, he answered "Anything, anything."

The few members who had come to the committee were reduced to the same despairing consent, and Julius was allowed to despatch a telegram to St. Faith's, which had sent Sisters in the emergency at St. Awdry's. He likewise brought an offer, suggested by Raymond, of a great old tithe barn, his own property, but always rented by Mrs. Poynsett, in a solitary field, where the uninfected children might be placed under good care, and the houses in Water

Lane thus relieved. As to a fever hospital, Raymond had sent his advice to use the new town-hall itself. A word from him went a great way just then with the Town Council, and the doctors were delighted with the proposal.

Funds and contributions of bedding, clothing, food, and wine were coming in, but hands were the difficulty. The adaptations of the town-hall and the bringing in of beds were done by one strong carpenter and Mrs. Duncombe's man Alexander, whom she had brought with her, and who proved an excellent orderly; and the few who would consent, or did not resist occupying the beds there, were carried in by Herbert Bowater and a strapping young doctor who had come down for this fever pasture. There Mrs. Duncombe and Miss Slater received them. No other volunteer had come to light willing to plunge into this perilous and disgusting abyss of misery; and among the afflicted families the power of nursing was indeed small.

However, the healthy children were carried away without much resistance, and established in the great barn under a trustworthy widow; and before night, two effective-looking Sisters were in charge at the hospital.

Still, however, no telegram, no letter, came from Eleonora Vivian. Mr. M'Vie had found a nurse for Lady Tyrrell, but old Sir Harry rode in to meet every delivery of the post, and was half distracted at

finding nothing from her; and Frank's murmurs of her name were most piteous to those who feared that, if he were ever clearly conscious again, it would only be to know how heavy had been the meed of his folly.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RETREAT.

"What dost thou here, frail wanderer from thy task?"
Christian Year.

ELEONORA VIVIAN was trying to fix her attention on writing out the meditation she had just heard from Dr. Easterby.

It had been a strange time. All externally was a great hush. There was perfect rest from the tumult of society, and from the harassing state of tacit resistance habitual to her. This was the holy quietude for which she had longed, yet where was the power to feel and profit by it? Did not the peace without only make her hear the storm within all the more?

A storm had truly been raging within ever since Conny Strangeways had triumphantly exhibited the prize she had won from Frank Charnock at the races; and Camilla had taken care that full and undeniable evidence should prove that this was not all that the young man had lost upon the Backsworth race-ground.

Lenore might guess, with her peculiarly painful intuition, who had been the tempter, but that did not lessen her severity towards the victim. In her resolution against a betting-man, had she not trusted Frank too implicitly even to warn him of her vow? Nay, had she not felt him drifting from her all through the season, unjustly angered, unworthily distrustful, easily led astray. All the misgivings that had fretted her at intervals and then cleared away seemed to gather into one conviction—Frank had failed her!

Eleonora's nature was one to resent before grieving. Her spirit was too high to break down under the first shock, and she carried her head proudly to the ball, betraying by no outward sign the stern despair of her heart, as she listened to the gay chatter of her companions, and with unflinching severity she carried out that judicial reply to Frank which she had already prepared, and then guarded herself among numerous partners against remonstrance or explanation. It had been all one whirl of bewilderment; Lady Tyrrell tired, and making the girls' intended journey on the morrow a plea for early departure; and the Strangeways, though dancing indefatigably, and laughing at fatigue, coming away as soon as they saw she really wished it. All said good-night and good-bye together, both to Lady Tyrrell and Sir Harry, and Lenore started at ten o'clock without having seen either. Her sense of heroism lasted till after the glimpse of Frank on the road. Her mood was of

bitter disappointment and indignation. Frank was given up, but not less so were her father, her sister, and the world. Sir Harry had made Camilla suffice to him, he did not want her. He had been the means of perverting Frank, and Lenore could not see that she need any longer be bound for his sake to the life she detested. In a few weeks she would be of age, and what would then prevent her from finding a congenial home in the Sisterhood, since such kindred could have no just claim to her allegiance. It was the hasty determination of one who had suffered a tacit persecution for three years, and was now smarting under the cruellest of blows. Her lover perverted, her conditions broken, her pledge gambled away, and all this the work of her father and sister!

Conny and Bee thought her grave and more silent than usual, and when Lady Susan met them in London there was no time for thought. Saturday was spent on a harvest festival at a suburban church, after which the daughters were despatched to their uncle's by a late train. Sunday was spent in the pursuit of remarkable services; and on Monday Lady Susan and Eleonora had gone to St. Faith's and the Retreat began.

Here was to be the longed-for rest, for which she had thirsted all the more through those days of hurry and of religious spectacles, as she felt that, be they what they might to their regular attendants, to her, as an outsider, they could be but sights, into

whose spirit her sick and wearied soul could not enter.

Here was no outward disturbance, no claim from the world, no importunate chatter, only religious services in their quietest, most unobtrusive form; and Dr. Easterby's low tender tones, leading his silent listeners to deep heart-searchings, earnest thoughts, and steadfast resolutions.

Ah! so no doubt it was with many; but Lena, with book and pen, was dismayed to find that the one thing she recollected was the question, "Friend, how camest thou in hither?" After that, she had only heard her own thoughts. Her mind had lapsed into one vague apprehension of the effects of having cut off all communication with home, imaginings of Frank's despair, relentings of pity, all broken by dismay at her own involuntary hypocrisy in bringing such thoughts into the Retreat. Had she any right to be there at all? Was not a thing that should have been for her peace become to her an occasion of falling?

It was Thursday evening, and on the morrow there would be the opportunity of private interviews with Dr. Easterby. She longed for the moment, chiefly to free herself from the sense of deception that had all this time seemed to vitiate her religious exercises, deafen her ears, and blow aside her prayers. There was a touch on her shoulder, and one of the Sisters who had received the ladies said, interrogatively,

"Miss Vivian? The Mother would be obliged if you would come to her room."

The general hush prevented Lenore from manifesting her extreme agitation, and she moved with as quiet a step as she could command, though trembling from head to foot. In the room to which she came stood the Superior and Dr. Easterby, and a yellow-telegram-paper lay on the table.

"My father?" she asked.

"No," said the Superior kindly, "it is your sister, who is ill. Here is the telegram:"—

"Sister Margaret to the Mother Superior, St. Faith's, Dearport. Lady Tyrrell has the fever. Miss Vivian much needed.

"WILSBRO', *Sept. 26th*, 5.30."

"The fever!" She looked up bewildered, and the Superior added—

"You did not know of a fever at Wilsbro'? Some of our nursing Sisters were telegraphed for, and went down yesterday. I was sorry to send Sister Margaret away just when her mother and you are here; but she was the only available head, and the need seemed great."

"I have heard nothing since I left home on Friday," said Eleonora, hoarsely. "It is my own fault. They think I am at Revelrig."

"Your family do not know you are here?" said the Superior gravely.

"It was very wrong," she said. "This is the punishment. I must go. Can I?"

"Surely, as soon as there is a train," said the Superior, beginning to look for a *Bradshaw;* while Dr. Easterby gave Lenore a chair, and bade her sit down. She looked up at his kind face, and asked whether he had heard of this fever.

"On Sunday evening, some friends who came out from Backsworth to our evening service spoke of an outbreak of fever at Wilsbro', and said that several of the Charnock family were ill. I have had this card since from young Mr. Bowater :—

"T. F. in severe form. J. C. well, but both his brothers are down in it, and Lady R.'s brother, also Lady T. and the Vicar. No one to do anything ; we have taken charge of Wilsbro'. I have no time to do more than thank you for unspeakable kindness.

"H. B."

"You knew?" exclaimed Lenore, as she saw her sister's initial.

"I knew Lady Tyrrell was ill, but I do not know who the ladies are whom I address. I did not guess that you were here," said Dr. Easterby gently.

No one living near Backsworth could fail to know Sir Harry Vivian's reputation, so that the master of Rood House knew far better than the Superior of St. Faith's how much excuse Lenore's evasion might have; but whatever could seem like tampering with young people was most distressing to the Sisters, and the Mother was more grave than pitiful.

There was no train till the mail at night, and there would be two hours to wait in London; but Lenore would listen to no entreaties to wait till morning, and

as they saw that she had plenty of health and strength, they did not press her, though the Superior would send a nurse with her, who, if not needed at Sirenwood, might work in Water Lane. It was thought best not to distract Lady Susan, and Lenore was relieved not to have her vehement regrets and fussy cares about her; but there were still two hours to be spent before starting, and in these Dr. Easterby was the kindest of comforters.

Had she erred in her concealment? He thought she had, though with much excuse. A Retreat was not like a sacrament, a necessity of a Christian's life; and no merely possible spiritual advantage ought to be weighed against filial obedience. It was a moment of contrition, and of outpouring for the burthened heart, as Lenore was able to speak of her long trial, and all the evil it had caused in hardening and sealing up her better nature. She even told of her unsanctioned but unforbidden engagement, and of its termination; yearning to be told that she had been hasty and hard, and to be bidden to revoke her rejection.

She found that Dr. Easterby would not judge for her, or give her decided direction. He showed her, indeed, that she had given way to pride and temper, and had been unjust in allowing no explanation; but he would not tell her to unsay her decision, nor say that it might not be right, even though the manner had been wrong. While the past was repented, and

had its pardon, for the future he would only bid her wait, and pray for guidance and aid through her trial.

"My child," he said, "chastening is the very token of pardon, and therein may you find peace, and see the right course."

"And you will pray for me—that however it may be, He may forgive me?"

"Indeed, I will. We all will pray for you as one in sorrow and anxiety. And remember this: There is a promise that a great mountain shall become a plain; and so it does, but to those who bravely try to climb it in strength not their own, not to those who try to go round or burrow through."

"I see," was all she answered, in the meek submissive tone of a strong nature, bent but not daring to break down. She could not shed tears, deeply as she felt; she must save all her strength and bear that gnawing misery which Herbert Bowater's mention of J. C.'s brothers had inflicted upon her—bear it in utter uncertainty through the night's journey, until the train stopped at Wilsbro' at eleven o'clock, and her father, to whom she had telegraphed, met her, holding out his arms, and absolutely crying over her for joy.

"My dear, my dear, I knew you would come; I could trust to my little Lena. It was all some confounded mistake."

"It was my fault. How is she?"

"Does nothing but ask for you. Very low—nasty

fever at night. What's that woman? M'Vie sent a nurse, who is awfully jealous; can't have her in to Camilla; but there's plenty to do; Anaïs is laid up —coachman too, and Joe—half the other servants gone off. I told Victor I would pay anything to him if he would stay."

"And—at Compton?" faintly asked Lenore.

"Bad enough, they say. Serves 'em right; Mrs. Raymond was as mischievous as Duncombe's wife, but I've not heard for the last two days; there's been no one to send over, and I've had enough to think about of my own."

"Who have it there?" she managed to say.

"Raymond and his wife, both; and Frank and the young De Lancey, I heard. I met Julius Charnock the other day very anxious about them. He's got his tithe barn stuffed with children from Water Lane, as if he wanted to spread it. All their meddling! But what kept you so long, little one? Where were you hiding?—or did Lady Susan keep it from you? I began to think you had eloped with her son. You are sure you have not?"

"I was wrong, father; I went to a Retreat with Lady Susan."

"A what? Some of Lady Susan's little poperies, eh? I can't scold you, child, now I've got you; only have your letters forwarded another time," said Sir Harry, placable as usual when alone with Lenore.

Fears of infection for her did not occur to him.

Mr. M'Vie held the non-contagion theory, and helpless selfishness excluded all thoughts of keeping his daughter at a distance. He clung to her as he used to do in former days, before Camilla had taken possession of him, and could not bear to have her out of reach. In the sick-room she was of disappointingly little use. The nurse was a regular professional, used to despotism, and resenting her having brought home anyone with her, and she never permitted Miss Vivian's presence, except when the patient's anxiety made it necessary to bring her in; and when admitted, there was nothing to be done but to sit by Camilla, and now and then answer the weary disjointed talk, and, if it grew a little livelier, the warning that Lady Tyrrell was getting excited was sure to follow.

Outside there was enough to do, in the disorganized state of the sick and panic-stricken household, where nobody was effective but the French valet and one very stupid kitchen-maid. Lena helped the St. Faith's nurse in her charge of the French maid, but almost all her time in the morning was spent in domestic cares for the sick and for her father; and when he was once up, he was half plaintive, half passionate, if she did not at once respond to his calls. She read the papers to him, walked up and down the terrace with him while he smoked, and played *bezique* with him late into the night, to distract his thoughts. And where were hers, while each day's bulletin from

Compton Hall was worse than the last? Little Joe Reynolds had been sent home on being taken ill, and she would fain have gone to see him, but detentions sprang up around her, and sometimes it would have been impossible to go so far from the house, so that days had become weeks, and the month of October was old before she was walking down the little garden of old Betty's house. The door opened, and Julius Charnock came out, startling her by the sight of his worn and haggard looks, as he made a deprecating movement, and shut the door behind him. Then she saw that the blinds were in the act of being drawn down.

"Is it so?" she said.

"Yes," said Julius, in a quiet tone, as sad and subdued as his looks. "He slept himself away peacefully a quarter of an hour ago."

"I suppose I must not go in now. I longed to come before. Poor boy, he was like a toy flung away."

"You need not grieve over him," said Julius. "Far from it. You have done a great deal for him."

"I—I only caused him to be put into temptation."

"Nay. Your care woke his spirit up and guarded him. No one could hear his wanderings without feeling that he owed much to you. There is a drawing to be given to you that will speak much to you. It is at the Rectory; it was not safe here. And his mother is here. I can't but hope her soul has been reached through him. Yes," as Lenore leant against

the gate, her warm tears dropping, "there is no grief in thinking of him. He had yearnings and conceptions that could not have been gratified in his former station; and for him an artist's life would have been more than commonly uphill work—full of trial. I wish you could have heard the murmured words that showed what glorious images floated before him—no doubt now realized."

"I am glad he was really good," were the only words that would come.

The hearts of both were so full, that these words on what was a little further off were almost necessary to them.

"Take my arm," said Julius, kindly. "Our roads lie together down the lane. How is your sister? Better, I hope, as I see you here."

"She has slept more quietly. Mr. M'Vie thinks her a little better."

"So it is with Terry de Lancey," said Julius; "he is certainly less feverish to-day;" but there was no corresponding tone of gladness in the voice, though he added, "Cecil is going on well too."

"And——" Poor Lenore's heart died within her; she could only press his arm convulsively, and he had mercy on her.

"Frank's illness has been different in character from the others," he said; "the fever has run much higher, and has affected the brain more, and the throat is in a very distressing state; but Dr. Worth still does

not think there are specially dangerous symptoms, and is less anxious about him than Raymond."

"Ah! is it true?"

"He does not seem as ill as Frank; but there have been bleedings at the nose, which have brought him very low, and which have hitherto been the worst symptoms," and here the steady sadness of his voice quivered a little.

Lenore uttered a cry of dismay, and murmured, "Your mother?"

"She is absorbed in him. Happily, she can be with him constantly. They seem to rest in each other's presence, and not to look forward."

"And Cecil?"

"It has taken the lethargic turn with Cecil. She is almost always asleep, and is now, I believe, much better; but in truth we have none of us been allowed to come near her. Her maid, Grindstone, has taken the sole charge, and shuts us all out, for fear, I believe, of our telling her how ill Raymond is."

"Oh, I know Grindstone."

"Who looks on us all as enemies. However, Raymond has desired us to write to her father, and he will judge when he comes."

They were almost at the place of parting. Eleonora kept her hand on his arm, longing for another word, nay, feeling that without it her heart would burst. "Who is with Frank?"

"Anne. She hardly ever leaves him. She is our mainstay at the Hall."

"Is he ever sensible?" she faintly asked.

"He has not been really rational for nearly ten days now."

"If—if—Oh! you know what I mean. Oh! gain his pardon for me!" and she covered her face with her hand.

"Poor Frank!—it is of your pardon that he talks. Tell me, Eleonora, did you ever receive a letter from my mother?"

"Never. Where was it sent?" she said starting.

"To Revelrig. It was written the day after the ball."

"I never went to Revelrig. Oh! if I could have spoken to you first I should have been saved from so much that was wrong. No one knew where I was."

"No, not till Sister Margaret told Herbert Bowater that her sisters had been at a ball at the town-hall the week before. Then he saw she was Miss Strangeways, and asked if she knew where you were."

"Ah, yes! disobedience—tacit deception—temper. Oh! they have brought their just punishment. But that letter!"

"I think it was to explain poor Frank's conduct at the races. Perhaps, as the servants at Revelrig had no knowledge of you, it may have been returned, and my mother's letter have been left untouched. I will see."

They knew they must not delay one another, and parted; Julius walking homewards by the Hall, where, alas! there was only one of the family able to move about the house, and she seldom left her patient.

Julius did, however, find her coming down-stairs with Dr. Worth, and little as he gathered that was reassuring in the physician's words, there was a wistful moisture about her eyes, a look altogether of having a bird in her bosom, which made him say, as the doctor hurried off, "Anne, some one must be better."

"Cecil is," she said; and he had nearly answered, "*only* Cecil," but her eyes brimmed over suddenly, and she said, "I am so thankful!"

"Miles!" he exclaimed.

She handed him a telegram. The *Salamanca* was at Spithead; Miles telegraphed to her to join him.

"Miles come! Thank God! Does mother know?"

"Hush! no one does," and with a heaving breast she added, "I answered that I could not and why, and that he must not come."

"No, I suppose he must not till he is free of his ship. My poor Anne!"

"Oh no! I know he is safe. I am glad! But the knowledge would tear your mother to pieces."

"Her soul is in Raymond now, and to be certain of Miles being at hand would be an unspeakable relief to him. Come and tell them."

"No, no, I can't!" she cried, with a sudden gush of emotion sweeping over her features, subdued instantly,

but showing what it was to her. "You do it. Only don't let them bring him here."

And Anne flew to her fastness in Frank's attic, while Julius repaired to Raymond's room, and found him as usual lying tranquil, with his mother's chair so near that she could hand him the cool fruit or drink, or ring to summon other help. Their time together seemed to both a rest, and Julius always liked to look at their peaceful faces, after the numerous painful scenes he had to encounter. Raymond, too, was clinging to him, to his ministrations and his talk, as to nothing else save his mother. Raymond had always been upright and conscientious, but his religion had been chiefly duty and obligation, and it was only now that comfort or peace seemed to be growing out of it for him. As he looked up at his brother, he too saw the involuntary brightness that the tidings had produced, and said, "Is anyone else better, Julius? I know Terry is; I am so glad for Rose."

"I asked Anne the same question," said Julius. "Mother, you will be more glad than tantalized. The *Salamanca* is come in."

Raymond made an inarticulate sound of infinite relief. His mother exclaimed, "He must not come here! But Frankie could not spare Anne to him. What will she do?"

"She will stay bravely by Frank," said Julius. "We must all wait till the ship is paid off."

"Of course," said Raymond. "If she can rejoice

that he is out of danger, we will; I am content to know him near. It makes all much easier. And mother, he will find all ready to own what a priceless treasure he sent before him in his wife."

There was the old note of pain in the comparison. Julius's heart was wrung as he thought of Sirenwood, with the sense that the victim was dying, the author of the evil recovering. He could only stifle the thought by turning away, and going to the table in his mother's adjacent room, where letters had accumulated unopened. "On Her Majesty's Service" bore the post-mark which justified him in opening it, and enclosing the letter it contained to Miss Vivian.

He did so almost mechanically. He had gone through these weeks only by never daring to have a self. The only man of his family who could be effective; the only priest in the two infected parishes; he had steadfastly braced himself for the work. He ventured only to act and pray, never to talk, save for the consolation of others. To Wilsbro' he daily gave two morning hours, for he never failed to be wanted either for the last rites, or for some case beyond Herbert's experience, as well as to see the Vicar, who was sinking fast, in a devout and resigned frame, which impressed while it perplexed his brother clergyman, in view of the glaring deficiencies so plain to others, but which never seemed to trouble his conscience.

The nursing-staff still consisted of the Sisters, Herbert Bowater, Mrs. Duncombe and her man-

servant. Under their care, the virulence of the disease was somewhat abating, and the doctors ventured to say that after the next few days there would be much fewer fatal cases; but Water Lane was now a strangely silent place,—windows open, blinds flapping in the wind, no children playing about, and the "Three · Pigeons" remained the only public-house not shut up. It was like having the red-cross on the door.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE NIGHT.

"Cold, cold with death, came up the tide
In no manner of haste,
Up to her knees, and up to her side,
And up to her wicked waist;
For the hand of the dead, and the heart of the dead,
Are strong hasps they to hold."

G. Macdonald.

"RECTOR," said Herbert Bowater, "are you specially needed at home?"

"Why?" asked Julius pausing.

"There's that man Gadley."

"Gadley! Is he down?"

"It seems that he has been ill this fortnight, but in the low, smouldering form; and he and that hostler of his kept it a secret, for fear of loss of gain, and hatred of doctors, parsons, sisters, and authorities generally, until yesterday, when the hostler made off with all the money and the silver spoons. This morning early, a policeman, seeing the door open, went in, and found the poor wretch in a most frightful state, but quite sensible. I was passing as he came out to look

for help, and I have been there mostly ever since. He is dying—M'Vie says there's not a doubt of that, and he has got something on his mind. He says he has been living on Moy's hush-money all this time, for not bringing to light some embezzlement of your mother's money, and letting the blame light on that poor cousin of yours, Douglas."

Herbert was amazed at the lighting up of his Rector's worn, anxious face.

"Douglas! Thank heaven! Herbert, we must get a magistrate at once to take the deposition!"

"What! Do you want to prosecute Moy?"

"No, but to clear Archie."

"I thought he was drowned?"

"No; that was all a mistake. Miles saw him at Natal. Herbert, this will be life and joy to your sister. What!—you did not know about Jenny and Archie?"

"Not I—Jenny!—poor old Joan! So that's what has stood in her way, and made her the jolliest of old sisters, is it? Poor old Joanie! What! was she engaged to him?"

"Yes, much against your father's liking, though he had consented. I remember he forbade it to be spoken of,—and you were at school."

"And Joan was away nursing old Aunt Joan for two years. So Archie went off with this charge on him, and was thought to be lost! Whew! How did she stand it? I say, does she know he is alive?"

"No, he forbade Miles to speak. No one knows but Miles and I, and our wives. Anne put us on the scent. Now, Herbert, I'll go to the poor man at once, and you had better find a magistrate."

"Whom can I find?" said Herbert. "There's my father away, and Raymond ill, and Lipscombe waved me off—wouldn't so much as speak to me for fear I should be infectious."

"You must get a town magistrate."

"Briggs is frantic since he lost his son, and Truelove thinks he has the fever, though Worth says it is all nonsense. There's nobody but Whitlock. Dear old Jenny! Well, there always was something different from other people in her, and I never guessed what it was. I'd go to the end of the world to make her happy and get that patient look out of her eyes."

Herbert had nearly to fulfil this offer, for Mr. Whitlock was gone to London for the day, and magistrates were indeed scarce; but at last, after walking two miles out of the town, his vehemence and determination actually dragged in the unfortunate, timid justice of the peace who had avoided him in the road, but who could not refuse when told in strong earnest that the justification of an innocent man depended on his doing his duty.

Poor Mr. Lipscombe! The neglected "Three Pigeons" was just now the worst place in all Water Lane. The little that had hastily been done since the morning seemed to have had no effect on the fœtid

atmosphere, even to Herbert's well-accustomed nostrils; and what must it have been to a stranger, in spite of the open window and all the disinfectants? And, alas! the man had sunk into a sleep. Julius, who still stood by him, had heard all he had to say to relieve his mind, all quite rationally, and had been trying to show him the need of making reparation by repeating all to a magistrate, when the drowsiness had fallen on him; and though the sound of feet roused him, it was to wander into the habitual defiance of authority, merging into terror.

Herbert soothed him better than anyone else could do, and he fell asleep again; but Mr. Lipscombe declared it was of no use to remain—nothing but madness; and they could not gainsay him. He left the two clergymen together, feeling himself to have done a very valiant and useless thing in the interests of justice, or at the importunity of a foolishly zealous young curate.

"Look here," said Herbert, "Whitlock may be trusted. Leave a note for him explaining. I'll stay here; I'm the best to do so, any way. If he revives and is sensible, I'll send off at once for Whitlock, or if there is no time, I'll write it down and let him see me sign it."

"And some one else, if possible," said Julius. "The difficulty is that I never had authority given me to use what he said to me in private. Rather the contrary, for old instinctive habits of caution awoke the instant

I told him it was his duty to make it known, and that Archie was alive. I don't like leaving you here, Herbert, but Raymond was very weak this morning; besides, there's poor Joe's funeral."

"Oh, never mind. He'll have his sleep out, and be all right when he awakes. Think of righting Jenny's young man! How jolly!"

Julius went across to the town-hall hospital, and told the Sisters, whose darling his curate was, of the charge he had undertaken, and they promised to look after him. After which Julius made the best of his way home, where Rosamond had, as usual, a bright face for him. Her warm heart and tender tact had shown her that obtrusive attempts to take care of him would only be harassing, so she only took care to secure him food and rest in his own house whenever it was possible, and that however low her own hopes might be, she would not add to his burden; and now Terry was so much better that she could well receive him cheerily, and talk of what Terry had that day eaten, so joyously, as almost to conceal that no one was better at the Hall.

"I will come with you," she said; "I might do something for poor Fanny," as the bell began to toll for little Joshua's funeral.

Fanny Reynolds, hearing some rumour of her boy's illness, had brought Drake to her home three days before his death. The poor little fellow's utterances, both conscious and unconscious, had strangely

impressed the man, and what had they not awakened in the mother? And when the words, so solemn and mysterious, fell on those unaccustomed ears in the churchyard, and Fanny, in her wild overpowering grief, threw herself about in an agony of sorrow and remorse, and sobbed with low screams, it was "the lady" whom she viewed as an angel of mercy, who held her and hushed her; and when all was over, and she was sinking down, faint and hysterical, it was "the lady" who—a little to the scandal of the more respectable—helped Drake to carry her to the Rectory, the man obeying like one dazed.

"I must leave the sheep that was lost to you, Rose," said Julius. "You can do more for them than I as yet, and they have sent for me to the Hall."

"You will stay there to-night if they want you? I don't want anyone," said Rosamond at the door.

He was wanted indeed at his home. Frank was in a wilder and more raving state than ever, and Raymond so faint and sinking, and with such a look about him, that Julius felt, more than he had ever done before, that though the fever had almost passed away, there was no spirit or strength to rally. He was very passive, and seemed to have no power to wonder, though he was evidently pleased when Julius told him both of Archie Douglas's life and the hopes of clearing his name. "Tell Jenny she was right," he said, and did not seem inclined to pursue the subject.

They wheeled Mrs. Poynsett away at her usual hour,

when he was dozing; and as Frank was still tossing and moaning incoherently, and often required to be held, Julius persuaded Anne to let him take her place with him, while she became Raymond's watcher. He dozed about half an hour, and when she next gave him some food, he said, in a very low feeble tone:

"You have heard from Miles?"

"Yes; he says nothing shall stop him the moment they are paid off."

"That's right. No fear of infection—that's clear," said Raymond.

"I think not—under God!" and Anne's two hands unseen clasped over her throbbing, yearning heart.

"Dear old fellow!" said Raymond. "It is such pleasure to leave mother to him. If I don't see him, Anne, tell him how glad I am. I've no charge. I know he will do it all right. And mother will have you," and he held out his hand to her. Presently he said: "Anne. One thing——"

"Yes," she said anxiously.

"You always act on principle, I know; but don't hang back from Miles's friends and pleasures. I know the old fellow, Anne. His nature is sociable, and he wants sympathy in it."

"I know what you mean, Raymond," said Anne; "I do mean to try to do right——"

"I know, I know," said he, getting a little excited, and speaking eagerly; "but don't let right blind you.

Anne, if you censure and keep from all he likes—if you will be a recluse and not a woman—he—don't be offended, Anne; but if you leave him to himself, then will every effort be made to turn him from you. You don't believe me."

"My dear Raymond, don't speak so eagerly," as his cheeks flushed.

"I must! I can't see his happiness and yours wrecked like mine. Go with him, Anne. Don't leave him to be poisoned. Mesmerism has its power over whoever has been under the spell. And he has—he has! She will try to turn him against you and mother."

"Hush, Raymond! Indeed I will be on my guard. There's no one there. What are you looking at?"

"Camilla!" he said, with eyes evidently seeing something. "Camilla! Is it not enough to have destroyed *one* peace?"

"Raymond, indeed there is no one here."

But he had half raised himself. "Yes, Camilla, you have had your revenge. Let it be enough. No—no; I forgive you; but I forbid you to touch her."

He grasped Anne's arm with one hand, and stretched the other out as though to warn some one away. The same moment there was another outburst of the bleeding. Anne rang for help with one hand, and held him as best she could. It lasted long, and when it was over he was manifestly dying. "It is coming," he said, looking up to Julius. "Pray! Only first—

my love to Cecil. I hope she is still young enough not to have had all her life spoilt. Is her father coming?"

"To-morrow," said Anne.

"That's well. Poor child! she is better free."

How piteously sad those words of one wedded but a year! How unlike the look that met his mother's woeful yet tender eyes, as she held his hand. She would aid him through that last passage as through all before, only a word of strong and tender love, as he again looked up to Julius and Anne, as if to put her in their keeping, and once more murmured something of "Love to sweet Rose! Now, Julius, pray!"

An ever dutiful man, there was no wandering in look or tone. He breathed "Amen" once or twice, but never moved again, only his eyes still turned on his mother, and so in its time came the end.

Old Susan saw at first that the long fluttering gasp had no successor, and her touch certified Julius. He rose and went towards his mother. She held out her hands and said, "Take me to my Frank."

"We had better," whispered Anne.

They wheeled her to the foot of the stairs. Julius took her in his arms, Anne held her feet, and thus they carried her up the stairs, and along the passage, hearing Frank's husky rapid babble all the way, and finding him struggling with the fierce strength of delirium against Jenkins, who looked as if he thought them equally senseless, when he saw his helpless mistress carried in.

"Frank, my boy, do lie still," she said, and he took no notice; but when she laid her hand on his, he turned, looked at her with his dulled eyes, and muttered, "Mother!"

It was the first recognition for many a day! and, at the smoothing motion of her hand over him, while she still entreated, "Lie still, my dear," the mutterings died away; the childish instinct of obedience stilled the struggles; and there was something more like repose than had been seen all these weary months.

"Mother," said Julius, "you can do for us what no one else can. You will save him."

She looked up to him, and hope took away the blank misery he had dreaded to see. "My poor Frankie," she said dreamily, "he has wanted me, I will not leave him now."

All was soon still; Frank's face had something like rest on it, as he lay with his mother's hand on his brow, and she intent only on him.

"You can leave them to me, I think," said Anne. "I will send if there be need; but if not, you had better not come up till you have been to Wilsbro'—if you must go."

"I must, I fear; I promised to come to Fuller if he be still here. I will speak to Jenkins first."

Julius was living like a soldier in a campaign, with numbers dropping beside him, and no time to mourn, scarcely to realize the loss, and he went on, almost as if he had been a stranger; while the grief of poor old

Jenkins was uncontrollable, both for his lady's sake and for the young master, who had been his pride and glory. His sobs brought out Mrs. Grindstone into the gallery, to insist, with some asperity, that there should be no noise to awaken her mistress, who was in a sweet sleep.

"We will take care," said Julius, sadly. "I suppose she had better hear nothing till Mr. Charnock comes."

"She must be left to me, sir, or I cannot be answerable for the consequences," was the stiff reply, wherewith Mrs. Grindstone retreated into her castle.

Julius left the hushed and veiled house, in the frosty chill of the late autumn just before dawn, shivering between grief and cold, and he walked quickly down the avenue, feeling it strange that the windows in the face of his own house were glittering back the reflection of the setting moon.

Something long and black came from the opposite direction. "Rector," it said, in a low hoarse voice, "I've got leave from him to use what he said to you. Sister Margaret and I signed it. Will that do?"

"I can't tell now, Herbert, I can't think. My brother is just gone," said Julius in his inward voice.

"Raymond! No? Oh, I beg your pardon; I never thought of that, Raymond——"

"Go home and go to bed," said Julius, as the young

man wrung his hand. "Rest now—we must think another time."

Did Rosamond know, was perhaps the foremost of his weary thoughts. Ah! did she not? Was she not standing with her crimson shawl round her, and the long black plaits falling on it, to beckon him to the firelit comfort of his own room? Did she not fall on his neck as he came heavily up, and cling around him with her warm arms? "Oh, Julius, what a dear brother he was! What can we do for your mother?"

As he told her how Frank's need did more than any support could do for her, her tears came thicker; but in spite of them, her fond hands put him into the easy-chair by the fire, and drew off his damp boots; and while listening to the low sunken voice that told her of the end, she made ready the cup of cocoa that was waiting, and put the spoon in his hand in a caressing manner, that made her care, comfort, not oppression. Fatigue seconded her, for he took the warm food, faltered and leant back, dozing till the baby's voice awoke him, and as he saw Rosamond hushing her, he exclaimed:

"O, Rose! if poor Raymond had ever known one hour like this!" and he held out his arms for his child.

"You know I don't let you hold her in that coat. Go into your dressing-room, have your bath, and put on your dressing-gown, and if you will lie on the bed, you shall take care of her while I go and

feed Terry. You can't do anything for anybody yet, it is only six o'clock."

These precautions, hindering his going jaded and exhausted into infection, were what Rosamond seemed to live for, though she never forced them on him, and he was far too physically tired out not to yield to the soothing effect; so that even two hours on the bed sent him forth renovated to that brief service in the Church, where Herbert and he daily met and found their strength for the day. They had not had time to exchange a word after it before there was a knock at the vestry door, and a servant gave the message to Herbert who had opened it: "Lady Tyrrell is taken worse, sir, and Sir Harry Vivian begged that Mr. Charnock would come immediately."

A carriage had been sent for him, and he could only hurry home to tell Rosamond to send on the pony to Sirenwood, to take him to Wilsbro', unless he were first wanted at home. She undertook to go up to the Hall and give Anne a little rest, and he threw himself into the carriage, not daring to dwell on the pain it gave him to go from his brother's death-bed to confront Camilla.

At the door Eleonora came to meet him. "Thank you," she said. "We knew it was no time to disturb you."

"I can be better spared *now*," answered Julius.

"You don't mean——" she said, with a strange look, which was not quite surprise.

"Yes, my dear brother left us at about three o'clock last night. A change came on at twelve."

"Twelve!" Eleonora laid her hand on his arm, and spoke in a quick agitated manner. "Camilla was much better till last night, when at twelve I heard such a scream that I ran into her room. She was sitting up with her eyes fixed open, like a clairvoyante, and her voice seemed pleading—pleading with *him*, as if for pardon, and she held out her hands and called him. Then, suddenly, she gave a terrible shriek, and fell back in a kind of fit. Mr. M'Vie can do nothing, and though she is conscious now, she does nothing but ask for you and say that he does not want you now."

Julius grew paler, as he said very low, "Anne said he seemed to be seeing and answering *her*. Not like delirium, but as if she were really there."

"Don't tell anyone," entreated Eleonora, in a breathless whisper, and he signed consent, as both felt how those two spirits must have been entwined, since these long years had never broken that subtle link of sympathy which had once bound them.

Sir Harry's face, dreary, sunken, and terrified, was thrust over the balusters, as he called, "Don't hinder him, Lena, she asks for him every moment;" and as they came on, he caught Julius's hand, saying, "Soothe her, soothe her—'tis the only chance. If she could but sleep!"

There lay Camilla Tyrrell, beautiful still, but more

than ever like the weird tragic head with snake-wreathed brows, in the wasted contour of her regular features and the flush on her hollow cheeks, while her eyes burned with a strange fire that almost choked back Julius's salutation of peace, even while he breathed it, for might not the Son of Peace be with some there? The eager glance seemed to dart at him, "Julius Charnock!" she cried, "Come!" and as he would have said some word about her health, she cut him short, "Never mind that; I must speak while my brain serves. After that be the priest. He is dead!"

"My brother? Yes."

"The only one I ever loved! There's no sin nor scandal in saying so now. His wife is better? It will never kill her."

"She does not know."

"No? There was nothing to make her. He could not give her his heart, try as he would. Why did he turn the unchangeable to hate! hate! hate!"

"Lady Tyrrell, you did not send for me to hear what ought not to be said at all?"

"Don't fly off," she said. "I had really something to say. It was not wholly hate, Julius; I really tried to teach his little idiot of a wife to win him at last. I meant it to turn out well, and nothing could, with that mother there."

"I must leave you, Lady Tyrrell, if you will not control yourself."

"Don't be hard on me, Julius," and she looked up with the glance of better days. "You idolize her, like all the rest of you; but she chilled me and repelled me, and turned me to bitterness, when I was young and he might have led me. Her power and his idolatry made me jealous, and what I did in a fit of petulance was so fastened on that I could not draw back. Why did not he wait a little longer to encumber himself with that girl! No—that wasn't what I had to say —it's all over now. It is the other thing. How is Frank?"

"Very ill indeed; but quieter just now."

"Then there shall not be another wreck like ours. Lena, are you here? You saw that Frank had let Constance Strangeways win your pebble. It was because I showed him the one Beatrice bought, and he thought it yours. Yes, I saw nothing else for it. What was to become of the property if you threw yourself away, and on *her* son?" she added, with the malignant look. "Whether he knew of this little vow of yours I can't tell, but he had lost his head and did for himself. It was for your good and papa's; but I shall not be here to guide the clue, so you must go your own way, and be happy in it, if *she* will let you. Father, do you hear? Don't think to please me by hindering the course of true love; and you, Julius, tell Frank he was 'a dull Moor.' I liked the boy, I was sorry for him; but he ought to have

known his token better;—and there was the estate to be saved."

"Estates weigh little now!"

"Clerical! I suppose now is the time for it? You were all precision at Compton. It would kill me; I can't live with Mrs. Poynsett. No, no, Tom, I can't have old Raymond quizzed; I'll get him out of it when the leading-strings are cut. What right has she——?"

The delirium had returned. Julius's voice kept her still for a few moments, but she broke out afresh at his first pause, and murmurs fell thick and fast from her tongue mixing the names of her brother and Raymond with railings at Mrs. Poynsett for slights in the days when the mother was striving to discourage the inclination that resulted in the engagement.

Earnestly did Julius beseech for peace, for repentance for the poor storm-tossed soul; but when the raving grew past control, and the time was coming for his ministrations to the Vicar of Wilsbro', he was forced to leave her. Poor old Sir Harry would have clung to him as to anything like a support, but Eleonora knew better. "No, dear papa," she said, "he has given us too much of his time already. He must go where he can still help. Poor Camilla cannot attend to him."

"If she came to herself——"

"Then send for me. I would come instantly. Send to the town-hall any time before twelve, after that to

Compton. Send without scruples, Lenore, you have truly the right."

They did not send, except that a note met him as he returned home, telling him that suffusion of the brain had set in. Camilla Tyrrell did not survive Raymond Poynsett twelve hours.

CHAPTER X.

COME BACK.

"And are ye sure the news is true?
And are ye sure he's weel?"

J. Thompson.

ELEONORA VIVIAN was striving to write her sorrowful announcements in the deepening dusk of that autumn evening, while her father had shut himself up after his vigil to sleep under Victor's care, when a message came that Lady Rosamond Charnock earnestly begged to see her. She stood with a face white and set, looking like a galvanised corpse, as her lips framed the words, "He is dead!"

"No!" almost screamed Rosamond, snatching her hand. "No! But no one can save him but you. Come!"

Without a word, Eleonora stepped into her own room and came back in cloak, hat, and veil.

"Right," said Rosamond, seizing her arm, and taking her to the pony-carriage at the door, then explaining while driving rapidly: "He has left off

raving ever since his mother has been with him, but he lies—not still but weak, not speaking, only moaning now and then. His throat is so dreadful that it is hard to give him anything, and he takes no notice of what one says, only if his mother takes the spoon. He gets weaker, and Dr. Worth says it is only because there is no impulse to revive him—he is just sinking because he can't be roused. When I heard that, I thought I knew who could."

Eleonora's lips once moved, but no sound came from them, and Rosamond urged her little pony to its best speed through the two parks from one veiled house to another, fastened it to the garden-door without calling anyone, and led her silent companion up the stairs.

Mrs. Poynsett felt a hand on her shoulder, and Rosamond said, "I have brought our only hope," and Eleonora stood, looking at the ghastly face. The yellow skin, the inflamed purple lips, the cavernous look of cheeks and eyes, were a fearful sight, and only the feeble incessant groping of the skeleton fingers showed life or action.

"Put this into his hand," said Rosamond, and Lenore found the pebble token given to her, and obeyed. At the touch, a quivering trembled over face and form, the eyelids lifted, the eyes met hers, there was a catching of the breath, a shudder and convulsive movement. "He is going," cried his mother, but Anne started forward with drops of strong stimulant,

Rosamond rubbed spirit into his forehead, the struggle lessened, the light flickered back into his brown eyes, his fingers closed on hers. "Speak to him," said Mrs. Poynsett. "Do you see her, Frankie dear?"

"Frank! dear Frank, here I am."

The eyes gazed with more meaning, the lips moved, but no sound came till Anne had given another drop of the stimulant, and the terrible pain of the swallowing was lessened. Then he looked up, and the words were heard.

"Is it true?'

"It is, my dear boy. It is Lena."

"Here, Frank," as still the wistful gaze was unsatisfied; she laid her hands on his, and then he almost smiled and tried to raise it to his cheeks, but he was too weak; and she obeyed the feeble gesture, and stroked the wasted face, while a look of content came over it, the eyes closed, and he slept with his face against her hand, his mother watching beside with ineffable gratitude and dawning hope.

Lenore was forgetting everything in this watching, but in another quarter of an hour Anne was forced again to torture him with her spoon; but life was evidently gaining ground, for though he put it from him at first, he submitted at Lena's gesture and word. She felt the increased warmth and power in his grasp, as he whispered "Lena, you are come back," then felt for the token.

Alas! that she must leave him. They knew

she must not stay away from her father; indeed, Rosamond had told no one of her attempt, her forlorn hope. Lena tried to give assurances that she only went because it could not be helped, and the others told him she would return, but still he held her, and murmured, "Stay." She could not tear herself away, she let him keep her hand, and again he dozed and his fingers relaxed. "Go now, my dear," said Mrs. Poynsett, "you have saved him. This stone will show him that you have been here. You will come back to-morrow, I may promise him?"

"Yes, yes. In the morning, or whenever I can be spared," whispered Lena, who was held for a moment to Mrs. Poynsett's breast, ere Rosamond took her away again, and brought her once more downstairs and to the pony-carriage. There she leant back, weeping quietly but bitterly over the shock of Frank's terribly reduced state, which seemed to take from her all the joy of his revival, weeping too at the cruel need that was taking her away.

"He will do now! I know he will," said Rosamond, happy in her bold venture.

"Oh! if I could stay!"

"Most likely you would be turned out for fear of excitement. The stone will be safer for him."

"Where did that come from?" asked Lenore, struck suddenly with the wonder.

"I wrote to Miss Strangeways, when I saw how he was always feeling, feeling, feeling for it, like the

Bride of Lammermoor. I told her there was more than she knew connected with that bit of stone, and life or death might hang on it. Then when I'd got it, I hardly knew what to do with it, for if it had soothed the poor boy delirious, the coming to his right mind might have been all the worse."

Rosamond kissed her effusively, and she dreamily muttered, "He must be saved." There was a sort of strange mist round her, as though she knew not what she was doing, and she longed to be alone. She would not let Rosamond drive her beyond the Sirenwood gate, but insisted on walking through the park alone in the darkness, by that very path where Frank had ten months ago exchanged vows with her.

Rosamond turned back to the Hall. It was poor Cecil's pony-carriage that she was driving, and she took it to the stable-yard, where her entreaty had obtained it from the coachman, whom she rewarded by saying "I was right, Brown, I fetched his best doctor," and the old servant understood, and came as near a smile as anyone at Compton could do on such a day.

"Is the carriage gone for Mr. Charnock?"

"Yes, my lady, I sent Alfred with it; I did not seem as if I could go driving into Wilsbro' on such a day."

Rosamond bade a kind farewell to the poor old coachman, and was walking homewards, when she saw a figure advancing towards her, strangely familiar,

and yet hat and coat forbade her to believe it her husband, even in the dusk. She could not help exclaiming, "Miles!"

"Yes!" he said, coming to a standstill. "Are you Rosamond?"

"I am;—Anne is quite well and Frank better. Oh! this will do them good! You know——"

"Yes—yes, I know," he said hastily, as if he could not bear to let himself out to one as yet a stranger. "My mother?"

"Absorbed in Frank too much to feel it yet fully. Anne watches them both. Oh! Miles, what she has been!" and she clasped his hand again. "Let me call her?"

And Rosamond opened the hall door just as some instinct, for it could hardly have been sense of hearing, had brought Anne upon the stairs, where, as Miles would have hurried up to her, she seemed, in the light grey dress she still wore, to hover like some spirit eluding his grasp like the fabled shades.

"Oh no! you ought not. Infection—I am steeped in it."

"Nonsense," and she was gathered into the strong grasp that was home and rest to her, while Miles was weeping uncontrollably as he held her in his arms. "O Nannie, Nannie! I did not think it would be like this. Why did they keep me till he was gone? No, I did not get the telegram, I only heard at the station. They let me go this morning, and I did think I should

have been in time." He loosed himself from her, and hung over the balustrade, struggling with a strong man's anguish, then said in a low voice, "Did he want me?"

"He knew it was your duty," said Anne. "We all were thankful you were kept from infection, and he said many little things, but the chief was that he trusted you too much to leave any special messages. Hark! that must be Mr. Charnock, Cecil's father! I must go and receive him. Stay back, Miles, you can't now—you know my room——"

He signed acquiescence, but lingered in the dark to look down and see how, though Rosamond had waited to spare them this reception, his wife's tall graceful figure came forward, and her kindly comforting gestures, as the two sisters-in-law took the new comer into the drawing-room, and in another minute Anne flitted up to him again. "That good Rosamond is seeing to Mr. Charnock," she said; "will you come, Miles? I think it will do your mother good; only quietly, for Frank knows nothing."

Mrs. Poynsett still sat by Frank. To Miles's eyes he was a fearful spectacle, but to Anne there was hourly progress; the sunken dejected look was gone, and though there was exhaustion, there was rest; but he was neither sleeping nor waking, and showed no heed when his brother dropped on one knee by his mother's side, put an arm round her waist, and after one fervent kiss laid his black head on her lap, hiding

his face there while she fondled his hair, and said, "Frank, Frankie dear, here's Miles come home." He did not seem to hear, only his lips murmured something like "Anne," and the tender hand and ready touch of his unwearied nurse at once fulfilled his need, while his mother whispered, "Miles, she is our blessing!"

Poor Miles! Never had sailor a stranger, though some may have had an even sadder, return. He had indeed found his wife, but hers was the only hand that could make Frank swallow the sustenance that he needed every half hour, or who knew how to relieve him. Indeed, even the being together in the sick-room was not long possible, for Anne was called to the door. Mr. Charnock was asking to see Mrs. Poynsett. Would Mrs. Miles come and speak to him?

Mr. Charnock was a small and restless man with white hair, little black eyes, looking keener than they were, and a face which had evidently been the mould of Cecil's. He was very kind, with a full persuasion that the consolations of his august self must be infallible; but this was coupled with an inclination to reprove everybody for the fate that had left his cherished darling a childless widow at two-and-twenty. To take him to Frank's room was impossible, and he had to be roundly told so. Neither had he seen his daughter. She was very weak, but recovering, and Grindstone, whom he had seen and talked with, was as strenuous in deprecating any excitement as he was *nervous* about it. So he could only be disposed of

in his room till dinner-time, when he came down prepared to comfort the family, but fulfilled his mission rather by doing such good as a blister, which lessens the force of the malady by counter-irritation.

Julius came up to be with Miles, and to help them through the dinner, the first which had been laid for many a long day. His inquiry for Cecil was answered, "She is progressing as favourably as there can be reason to expect, but I have not seen her. I follow the judgment of her faithful Grindstone."

"Then she still knows nothing——"

"Of her bereavement? No. Her state does not yet warrant it. In fact, I almost wish I had obeyed my original impulse, and brought down Venn to make the melancholy communication."

To everyone's surprise Anne bristled up, saying, "Why here is Julius, Mr. Charnock!"

Mr. Charnock bowed; "I understand that my cousin Julius has been engrossed by his wife's family and by the adjoining parish, the care of which he has assumed."

Anne fairly coloured up, and exclaimed, "Julius has been our mainstay and help in everything—I can't think how he has done it. He has been here whenever we needed him, as well as at Wilsbro', where people have been dying everywhere, the poor Vicar and all——"

"Far be it from me to discourage philanthropy," said Mr. Charnock, "only I would have it within due

bounds. I am an old-fashioned squire, of a school it may be, antiquated, an advocate of the parochial system; and I cannot help thinking that if this had been closely adhered to by hot-headed young clergymen, my poor child might not have been a childless widow at two-and-twenty."

Julius was too much tired and too sad-hearted to heed greatly what Mr. Charnock said. It was so strange to have Miles in sight, yet to feel so unable to be glad, that he scarcely heard anything. But Anne again took up the cudgels, "Mr. Charnock, you don't suppose that it was anything Julius did that brought this fever here. It was going to the town-hall among the drains."

"My dear Mrs. Miles Charnock, I am sure your husband will agree with me that sanitary arrangements and all connected with them are beyond the range of ladies, who are happily exempted from all knowledge of the subject."

Anne could not say aloud that she wished Cecil had held this opinion, but she subsided, while Mr. Charnock prosed on, asking questions about the arrangements, and seeming shocked to hear that the funeral must be early the next day, this being one of the prime injunctions of the doctors, and that no one had been asked to attend it. It made him sigh again for his poor daughter, as he handed Anne in to dinner. She did not stay half through it, for it was again the time for feeding Frank. Miles went half-

way upstairs with her and returned, looking very wistful. Julius smiled at him, "Your wife is too valuable, Miles; she is everyone's property."

"It must be very gratifying to you," added Mr. Charnock, "to find how example and superior society have developed the native qualities your discernment detected in the charming young lady who has just quitted us. It was a most commendable arrangement to send her to enjoy the advantages of this place."

"I sent her to be a comfort to my mother," said Miles, bluntly.

"And so she has been," said Julius, fervently, but *sotto voce.*

"I understand," said Mr. Charnock; "and as I was saying, my dear Cecil expressed from the first her desire to assist in forming her stranger sister-in-law, and I am happy to see the excellent effect. I should scarcely have guessed that she came from a colony."

"Indeed," Miles answered drily.

Mr. Charnock might have it his own way, if he liked to think Anne had been a Hottentot till Cecil reclaimed her.

The two brothers did feel something like joy when a message at last informed Mr. Charnock that his daughter was awake and he might see her. They drew nearer together, and leant against one another, with absolute joy in the contact. They were singularly alike in outline, voice, and manner, in everything

but colouring, and had always been one in spirit, except for the strong passion for adventure which had taken Miles to sea, to find he had chosen his profession too young to count the cost, and he held to it rather by duty than taste. Slight as had been his seniority, poor Raymond had always been on a sort of paternal pinnacle, sharing the administration with his mother, while Miles and Julius had paired on an equality.

"Poor mother!" sighed Miles. "How is she to live without him? Julius, did he leave any word for me with you?"

"Above all, that Anne is the daughter for my mother, and so she is."

"What, when this poor wife of Raymond's was said to be the superior creature?"

"You see her adoring father," said Julius. "My Rose has necessarily her own cares, but Anne has been my mother's silent aid and stay for months, and what she has been in the present need no words can say. My mother has had no power to take the direction of anything, her whole being has been absorbed, first in Raymond, now in Frank; and not only has Anne been Frank's constant nurse through these five weeks of the most frightful fever and delirium I have seen at all here, but she has had thought for all, and managed all the house and servants. We could do comparatively little, with Rose's brother ill at home, and the baby so young;

besides, there have been eleven cases in the parish; and there was Wilsbro'—but Anne has been the angel in the house."

"I knew—I knew she would be everything when once the first strangeness was over; but, poor girl, her heart is in Africa, and it has been all exile here; I could see it in every letter, though she tried to make the best of it. If there had but been a child here!"

"I think you will find sufficient attachment to mother to weigh a good deal with her. Poor Anne, she did think us all very wicked at first, and perhaps she does still, but at least this has drawn us all nearer together."

And then the brothers lowered their voices, and Miles heard the full history of Raymond's last illness, with all the details that Julius could have spoken of to none else, while the sailor's tears slowly dropped through the hands that veiled his face. It was a great deprivation to him that he might not look on Raymond's face again, but the medical edict had been decisive, and he had come home to be of use and not a burthen. As Julius told Rosamond, he only thoroughly felt the blessing of Miles's return when he bade good-night and left the Hall, in peace and security that it had a sufficient aid and stay, and that he was not deserting it.

Miles had proposed to send his wife to bed and take the night watch, and he so far prevailed that she lay down in the adjoining room in her dressing-

gown while he sat by Frank's side. She lay where she could feast her eyes upon him, as the lamplight fell on his ruddy brown cheek, black hair, and steady dark eye, so sad indeed, but so full of quiet strength and of heedful alacrity even in stillness—a look that poor Raymond, with all his grave dignity, had never worn. That sight was all Anne wanted. She did not speak, she did not sleep; it was enough, more than enough, to have him there. She was too much tired, body and mind, after five weeks of strain, for more than the sense that God had given her back what she loved, and this was "more than peace and more than rest."

CHAPTER XI.

BREAKING DOWN.

FUNERALS were little attended in these sad days. The living had to be regarded more than the dead, and Raymond Poynsett was only followed to the grave by his two brothers, his father-in-law, and some of the servants. Rosamond, however, weeping her soft profuse tears, could hear everything from behind the blind at Terry's open window, on that moist warm autumn day; everything, for no exception was made to the rule that coffins might not be taken into the church during this deadly sickness. She did hear a faltering and a blundering, which caused her to look anxiously at the tall white figure standing at the head of the grave, and, as she now saw, once or twice catching at the iron railing that fenced in the Poynsett tombs. Neither her husband nor his brother seemed to notice what she observed. Absorbed in the sorrow and in one another, they turned away after the service was ended, and walked towards the Hall. Rosamond did not speak for a minute or two, then she turned

round to Terry, who was sitting up in bed, with an awe-struck face, listening as well as he could to the low sounds, and watching her.

"Terry, dear, shall you mind my going to see after Herbert Bowater? I am sure they have let him overwork himself. If he is not fit to take Lady Tyrrell's funeral this afternoon, I *shall* send to Duddingstone on my own responsibility. I will not have Julius doing that!"

"Do you think he is ill—Bowater, I mean?" asked Terry.

"I don't like it. He seemed to totter as he went across the churchyard, and he blundered. I shall go and see."

"Oh yes, go," said Terry; "I don't want anybody. Don't hurry."

Rosamond put on her hat and sped away to Mrs. Hornblower's. As usual, the front door leading to the staircase was open, and, going up, she knocked at the sitting-room door; but the only response was such a whining and scratching that she supposed the dogs had been left prisoners there and forgotten, and so she turned the lock—but there was an obstruction; so that though Mungo and Tartar darted out and snuffed round her, only Rollo's paw and head appeared, and there was a beseeching earnestness in his looks and little moans, as if entreating her to come in. Another push, vigorously seconded by Rollo within, showed her that it was Herbert's shoulder that hindered her,

and that he was lying outstretched on the floor, apparently just recalled to consciousness by the push; for as Rollo proceeded to his one remedy of licking, there was a faint murmur of "Who—what——"

"It is I! What is the matter?"

"Lady Rose! I'll—I'll try to move—oh!" His voice died away, and Rosamond thrust in her salts, and called to Mrs. Hornblower for water, but in vain. However, Herbert managed to move a little to one side. She squeezed into the doorway, hastily brought water from his bedroom within, and, kneeling down by him, bathed his face, so that he revived to say, in the same faint voice, "I'm so sorry I made such mulls. I couldn't see. I thought I knew it by heart."

"Never mind, never mind, dear Herbert! You are better. Couldn't you let me help you to the sofa?"

"Oh, presently;" and as she took his head on her lap, "Thank you; I did mean to hold out till after this day's work; but it is all right now Bindon is come."

"Come!—is he?" she joyfully exclaimed.

"Yes, I saw him from the window. I was getting up to hail him when the room turned upside down with me."

"There's his step!" now exclaimed Rosamond. "Squeeze in, Mr. Bindon; you are a very welcome sight."

Mr. Bindon did make his way in, and stood

dismayed at the black mass on the floor. Rosamond and Rollo, one on each side of Herbert's great figure, in his cassock, and the rosy face deadly white, while Mungo and Tartar, who hated Mr. Bindon, both began to bark, and thus did the most for their master, whose call of "Quiet! you brutes," seemed to give him sudden strength. He took a grip of Rollo's curly back, and, supported by Mr. Bindon, dragged himself to the sofa and fell heavily back on it.

"Give him some brandy," said Mr. Bindon, hastily.

"There's not a drop of anything," muttered Herbert; "it's all gone——"

"To Wilsbro'," explained Rosamond; then seeing the scared face of Dilemma at the door, she hastily gave a message, and sent her flying to the Rectory, while Mr. Bindon was explaining.

"I wish I had known. I never will go out of the reach of letters again. I saw in the *Times*, at Innspruck, a mention of typhoid fever here, and I came back as fast as trains would bring me; but too late, I fear."

"You are welcome, indeed," repeated Rosamond. "Herbert has broken down at last, after doing more than man could do, and I am most thankful that my husband should be saved the funerals at Wilsbro'."

Mr. Bindon, whose face showed how shocked he was, made a few inquiries. He had learnt the main facts on his way, but had been seeking his junior to

hear the details, and he looked, like the warrior who had missed Thermopylæ, ashamed and grieved at his holiday.

The bottle Rosamond had sent for arrived, and there was enough vigour restored to make her say, "Here's a first service, Mr. Bindon, to help this poor fellow into bed."

"No, no!" exclaimed Herbert.

"You are not going to say there's nothing the matter with you?" said Rosamond, as a flush passed over the pale face.

"No," he said; "but I want to go home. I should have taken a fly at Wilsbro'. Cranky will see to me without bothering anybody else. If you would send for one——"

"I don't think I can till I know whether you are fit to move," said Rosamond. "I desired Dilemma to tell them to send Dr. Worth here when he comes to Terry. Besides, is it quite right to carry *this* into another place?"

"I never thought of that," said Herbert. "But they would shut me up; nobody come near me but Cranky." But there a shivering fit caught him, so that the sofa shook with him, and Rosamond covered him with rugs, and again told him bed was the only place for him, and he consented at last, holding his head as he rose, dizzy with the ache.

"Look here, Lady Rose," he said, falling back into a sitting posture at the first attempt, "where's my

writing case? If I go off my head, will you give this to the Rector, and ask him if it will be any good in the matter he knows of?" and he handed her an envelope. "And this keep," he added, giving her one addressed to his father. "Don't let him have it till it's all over. You know." Then he took up a pen and a sheet of paper, and got as far, with a shaking hand, as "Dear Crank ——" but there he broke down, and laid his head on the table, groaning.

"I'll do it. What shall I say, dear Herbert?"

"Only tell her to come to me," he gasped. "Cranstoun—our old nurse. Then I'll be no trouble."

While Mr. Bindon helped Herbert into his room, Rosamond sped home to send for Mrs. Cranstoun, arrange for the care of the new patient in the intervening hours, and fetch some of those alleviations of which experience had taught the use. Mr. Bindon came to meet her on her return, carefully shutting the door, and saying, "Lady Rosamond, can he be delirious already? He is talking of being plucked for his Ordination."

"Too true," said Rosamond. "I thought it a great shame to be so hard on a man with *that* in him; but I believe you expected it?"

"No; I may have said he would fail, but I never expected it."

"Fail, indeed! Fancy a man being turned back

who has worked night and day—night and day—doing all the very hardest services—never resting! Very likely killing himself!" cried Rosamond hotly. "May I come back to him? Terry can spare me, and if you will go to Wilsbro', I'll stay till my husband comes, or the doctor. The Sisters will tell you what to do."

Herbert was, however, so much more comfortable for being in bed, that he was able to give Mr. Bindon directions as to the immediate cares at Wilsbro'; but he was distressed at occupying Lady Rose, his great object being to be no trouble to anybody, though he had seen so much of the disease as to have been fully aware that it had been setting in for the last two days, yet his resolution to spare his Rector had kept him afoot till he had seen other help arrive. He declared that he wanted nobody but Rollo, who could fetch and carry, and call anyone, if only the doors were open, and really the creature's wistful eyes and gentle movements justified the commendation.

"Only," said Herbert anxiously, "I suppose this is not catching for dogs. You'll make a home for him, Lady Rose?" he added. "I should like you to have him, and he'll be happier with you than with anyone else."

"Herbert, I can't have you talk of that."

"Very well," he said, quietly. "Only you will keep my dear old fellow—I've had him from a puppy—and he is but three years old now."

Rosamond gave all promises, from her full heart, as she fondled the soft wise black head.

Herbert was unhappy too about Mrs. Hornblower's trouble. Harry had been one of the slighter cases, and was still in his room, a good deal subdued by the illness, and by the attention the lodger had shown him; for Herbert had spent many hours, when he had been supposed to be resting, in relieving Mrs. Hornblower, and she was now in a flood of gratitude, only longing to do everything for him herself. Had he not, as she declared, saved her son, body and soul?

The most welcome sight was Julius, who came down in dismay as soon as he could leave the Hall. "I am so glad," said the patient; "I want to talk things over while my head is clearer than it ever may be again."

"Don't begin by desponding. These fevers are much less severe now than six weeks ago."

"Yes; but they always go the hardest with the great big strong young fellows. I've buried twelve young men out of the whole forty-five."

"Poor lads, I doubt if their life had been such a preparation as yours."

"Don't talk of my life. A stewardship I never set myself to contemplate, and so utterly failed in. I've got nothing to carry to my God but broken vows and a wasted year."

"Nothing can be brought but repentance."

"Yes, but look at others who have tried, felt their duties, and cared for souls; while I thought only of

my vows as a restraint, and tried how much pleasure I could get in spite of them. A pretty story of all the ministry I shall ever have."

"These last weeks?"

"Common humanity—nonsense! I should always have done as much; besides, I was crippled everywhere, not merely by want of power as a priest, but by having made myself such a shallow, thoughtless ass. But that was not what I wanted to say. It was about Gadley and his confession."

"O, Herbert! I am afraid I was very unkind that night. I did not think of anything but our own trouble, nor see how much it had cost you."

"Of course not—nonsense. You had enough to think of yourself, and I was only ashamed of having bored you."

"And when I think of the state of that room, I am afraid it was then you took in the poison."

"Don't say *afraid*. If it was for Jenny, I shall have done some good in the world. But the thing is—is it good? Will it clear Douglas? I suppose what he said to you was under seal of confession?"

"Scarcely so, technically; but when a man unburthens himself on his death-bed, and then, so far from consenting, shows terror and dismay at the notion of his words being taken down as evidence, it seems to me hardly right or honourable to make use of them—though it would right a great wrong. But what did you get from him?"

"I gave Lady Rose the paper. He raved most horribly for an hour or two, as if all the foul talk of his pot-house had got into his brain," said Herbert, with a shudder. "Rector, Rector, pray for me, that I mayn't come out with *that* at any rate. It has haunted me ever since. Well, at last he slept, and woke up sinking but conscious, knew me, and began to ask if this was death, and was frightened, clutching at me, and asking to be held, and what he could do. I told him at least he could undo a wrong, if he would only authorize us to use what he said to clear Douglas; and then, as Sister Margaret had come across, I wrote as well as I could: 'George Gadley authorizes what he said to the Rev. Julius Charnock to be used as evidence;' and I suppose he saw us sign it, if he could see at all, for his sight was nearly gone."

Julius drew a long breath.

"And now, what was it?" said Herbert.

"Well, the trio—Moy, young Proudfoot, and Tom Vivian—detained a letter of my mother's, with a cheque in it, and threw the blame of it on Archie Douglas. They thought no one was in the office but themselves; but Gadley was a clerk there, and was in the outer room, where he heard all. He came to Moy afterwards, and has been preying on him for hush-money ever since."

"And this will set things straight?"

"Yes. How to set about the public justification I do not yet see; but with your father, and all the rest,

Archie's innocence will be as plain as it always has been to us."

"Where is he?"

"On an ostrich farm at Natal."

"Whew!—we must have him home. Jenny can't be spared. Poor Jenny, when she hears that, it will make all other things light to her."

"What is their address?"

"No, don't write. Mamma has had a fresh cold, and neither my father nor Jenny could leave her. Let them have a little peace till it gets worse. There will be plenty of time, if it is to be a twenty-eight days business like the others. Poor mamma!" and he rolled his head away; then, after some minutes of tossing and shivering, he asked for a prayer out of the little book in his pocket. "I should know it, but my memory is muddled, I think."

The book—a manual for sick-rooms—was one, which Julius had given him new five weeks back. It showed wear already, having been used as often in that time as in six ordinary years of parish work. By the time the hard-pressed doctor came, it was plain that the fever was setting in severely, aggravated no doubt by the dreadful night at the "Three Pigeons," and the unrelaxed exertions ever since; for he was made to allow that he had come home in the chill morning air, cold, sickened, and exhausted; had not chosen to disturb anybody, and had found no refreshment but a raw apple—the last drop of wine

having been bestowed on the sick; had lain down for a short sleep worse than waking, and had neither eaten nor slept since, but worked on by sheer strength of will and muscle. When Julius thought of the cherishing care that he had received himself, he shuddered, with a sort of self-reproach for his neglect; and the doctor, though good-humouredly telling Herbert not to think he knew anything about his own symptoms, did not conceal from Julius that enough harm had been done in these few days to give the fine Bowater constitution a hard struggle.

"Grown careless," he said. "Regular throwing away of his life."

Careless Herbert might have been, but Julius wondered whether this might not be losing of the life to find it.

Cranstoun or Cranky arrived, a charming old nurse, much gratified in the midst of her grief, and inclination to scold. She summarily sent off Mungo and Tartar by the conveyance that brought her, and would have sent Rollo away, but that Herbert protested against it, and no power short of an order from him would have taken the dog from his bedside.

And Mr. Bindon returned from Wilsbro' in unspeakable surprise. "The heroes of the occasion," he said, "were Bowater and Mrs. Duncombe! Every sick person I visited, and there were fourteen in all stages, had something to say of one or other.

Poor things, how their faces fell when they saw me instead of his bright, honest face! 'Cheering the very heart of one!' as a poor woman said; 'That's what I calls a true shepherd,' said an old man. You don't really mean he was rejected at the Ordination?"

"Yes, and it will make him the still truer shepherd, if he is only spared!"

"The Sisters can't say enough of him. They thought him very ill yesterday, and implored him to take care of himself; but he declared he could not leave these two funerals to you. But, after all, he is less amazing to me than Mrs. Duncombe. She has actually been living at the hospital with the Sisters. I should not have known her."

"Great revolutions have happened in your absence. Much that has drawn out her sterling worth, poor woman."

"I shall never speak harshly again, I hope. It seems to be a judgment on me that I should have been idling on the mountains, while those two were thus devoting themselves to my Master in His poor."

"We are thankful enough to have you coming in fresh, instead of breaking down now. Have you a sermon? You will have to take Wilsbro' to-morrow. Driver won't come. He wrote to the Churchwardens that he had a cold, and that his agreement was with poor Fuller."

"And you undertook the Sunday?"

"Yes. They would naturally have no Celebration, and I thought Herbert's preaching in the midst of his work would be good for them. You never heard such an apology and confession as the boy made to our people the first Sunday here, begging them to bear with him."

"Then I can't spare you anything here?"

"Yes, much care and anxiety. The visitation has done its worst in our house. We have got into the lull after the storm, and you need not be anxious about me. There is peace in what I have to do now. It is gathering the salvage after the wreck."

Then Julius went into his own house, where he found Terry alone, and, as usual, ravenously hungry.

"Is Bowater really ill?" he asked.

"I am afraid there is no believing otherwise, Terry," said Julius. "You will have to spare Rose to him sometimes, till some one comes to nurse him."

"I would spare anything to him," said Terry, fervently. "Julius, it is finer than going into battle!"

"I thought you did not care much for battles, Terry."

"If it was battles, I should not mind," said the boy; "it is peaceful soldiering that I have seen too much of. But don't you bother my father, Julius, I won't grumble any more; I made up my mind to that."

"I know you did, my boy; but you did so much

futile arithmetic, and so often told us that $a + b - c$ equalled Peter the Great, that Dr. Worth said you must not be put to mathematics for months to come, and I have told your father that if he cannot send you to Oxford, we will manage it."

A flush of joy lighted up the boy's face. "Julius, you are a brick of a brother!" he said. "I'll do my best to get a scholarship."

"And the best towards that you can do now is to get well as soon as possible."

"Yes. And you lie down on the sofa there, Julius, and sleep—Rose would say you must. Only I want to say one thing more, please. If I do get to Oxford, and you are so good, I've made up my mind to one thing. It's not only for the learning that I'll go; but I'll try to be a soldier in your army and Bowater's. That's all that seems to me worth the doing now."

So Julius dropped asleep, with a thankworthy augury in his ears. It is not triumph, but danger and death that lead generous spirits each to step where his comrade stood!

CHAPTER XII.

THE SALVAGE.

FRANK was certainly better. Ever since that sight of Eleonora he had been mending. If he muttered her name, or looked distressed, it was enough to guide his hand to her token, he smiled and slept again ; and on the Sunday morning his throat and mouth were so much better, that he could both speak and swallow without nearly so much pain ; but one of his earliest sayings was, "Louder, please, I can't hear. When does she come?"

Mrs. Poynsett raised her voice, Anne tried; but he frowned and sighed, and only when Miles uttered a sea-captain's call close to his ear, did he smile comprehension, adding, "Were you shouting?" a fact only too evident to those around.

"Then I'm deaf," he said. And Anne wrote and set before him, "We hope it will pass as you get better." He looked grateful, but there was little more communication, for his eyes and head were still weak, and signs and looks were the chief currency; however,

Julius met Eleonora after morning service, to beg her to renew her visit, after having first prepared her for what she would find. Eleonora was much distressed; then paused a minute, and said, "It does him good to see me?"

"It seems to be the one thing that keeps him up," said Julius, surprised at the question.

"Oh, yes! I can't—I could not stay away," she said. "It is all so wrong together; yet this last time cannot hurt!"

"Last time?"

"Yes; did you not know that papa has set his heart on going to London to-morrow? Yes, early to-morrow. And it will be for ever. We shall never see Sirenwood again."

She stood still, almost bent with the agony of suppressed grief.

"I am very sorry; but I do not wonder he wishes for change."

"He has been in an agony to go these three days. It was all I could do to get him to stay to-day. You don't think it will do Frank harm? Then I would stay, if I took lodgings in the village; but otherwise —poor papa—I think it is my duty—and he can't do without me."

"I think Frank is quite capable of understanding that you are forced to go, and that he need not be the worse for it."

"And then," she lowered her voice, "it does a

little reconcile me that I don't think we ought to go further into it till we can understand. I did make that dreadful vow. I know I ought not now; but still I did, in so many words."

"You mean against a gambler?"

"If it had only been against a gambler; but I was stung, and wanted to guard myself, and made it against anyone who had ever betted! If I go on, I must break it you see, and if I do, might it not bring mischief on him? I don't even feel as if it were *true* to have come to him on Friday, and now—yet they said it was the only chance for his life."

"Yes, I think it saved him then, and to disappoint him now might quite possibly bring a relapse," said Julius. "It seems to me that you can only act as seems right at the moment. When he is his own man again, you will better have the power of judging about this vow, and if it ought to bind you. And so, it may really be well you do not see more of him, and that his weakness does not lead you further than you mean."

A tottering step, and an almost agonized, though very short sob under the crape veil, proved to Julius that his counsel, though chiming in with her stronger, sterner judgment, was terrible to her, nor would he have given it, if he had not had reason to fear that while she had grown up, Frank had grown down; and that, after this illness, it would have to be proved whether he were indeed worthy of the high-minded

girl whom he had himself almost thrown over in a passion.

But there was no room for such misgivings when the electric shock of actual presence was felt—the thin hollow-cheeked face shone with welcome, the liquid brown eyes smiled with thankful sweetness, the fingers, fleshless, but cool and gentle, were held out; and the faint voice said, "My darling! Once try to make me hear."

And when, with all her efforts, she could only make him give a sort of smile of disappointment, she would have been stony-hearted indeed if she had not let him fondle her hand as he would, while she listened to his mother's report of his improvement. With those eyes fixed in such content on her face, it seemed absolutely barbarous to falter forth that she could come no more, for her father was taking her away.

"My dear, you must be left with us," cried Mrs. Poynsett. "He cannot spare you."

"Ah! but my poor father. He is lost without me. And I came of age on Tuesday, and there are papers to sign."

"What is it?" murmured Frank, watching their faces.

Mrs. Poynsett gave her the pen, saying, "You must tell him, if it is to be."

She wrote: "My father takes me to London to-morrow, to meet the lawyers."

His face fell; but he asked, "Coming back—when?"

She shook her head, and her eyes filled with tears, as she wrote: "Sirenwood is to be put up to auction."

"Your sister?" began Frank, and then his eye fell on her crape trimmings. He touched her sleeve, and made a low wail. "Oh! is everyone dead?"

It was the first perception he had shown of any death, though mourning had been worn in his room. His mother leant down to kiss him, bidding Lena tell him the truth; and she wrote:

"I am left alone with poor papa. Let me go—now you can do without me."

"Can I?" he asked, again grasping her hand.

She pointed to his mother and Anne; but he repeated, "You—you!"

"When you are better we will see how it is to be," she wrote.

He looked sadly wistful. "No, I can't now. Something was very wrong; but it won't come back. By and by. If you wouldn't go——"

But his voice was now more weak and weary, tired by the effort, and a little kneeling by him, allowing his tender touch, soothed him, enough to say submissively, "Good-bye, then—I'll come for you"—wherewith he faltered into slumber.

Rosamond had just seen her off in the pony carriage, and was on the way upstairs, when she stumbled on a little council, consisting of Dr. Worth,

Mr. Charnock, and Grindstone, all in the gallery. "A widow in her twenty-second year. Good heavens!" was the echo she heard; and Grindstone was crying and saying, "She did it for the best, and she could not do it, poor lamb, not if you killed her for it;" and Dr. Worth said, "Perhaps Lady Rosamond can. You see, Lady Rosamond, Mrs. Grindstone, whose care I must say has been devoted, has hitherto staved off the sad question from poor young Mrs. Poynsett, until now it is no longer possible, and she is becoming so excited, that——"

Cecil's bell rang sharply.

"I cannot—I cannot! In her twenty-second year!" cried her father, wringing his hands.

Grindstone's face was all tears and contortions; and Rosamond, recollecting her last words with poor Cecil, sprang forward, both men opening a way for her.

Cecil was sitting up in bed, very thin, but with eager eyes and flushed cheeks, as she held out her hands. "Rosamond! Oh! But aren't you afraid?"

"No, indeed, I'm always in it now," said Rosamond, kissing her, and laying her down; "it has been everywhere."

"Ah! then they sent him away—Raymond?" then clutching Rosamond's hand, and looking at her with searching eyes, "Tell me, has his mother any right? Would you bear it if she kept *you* apart?"

"Ah! Cecil, it was not her doing."

"You don't mean it was his own? Papa is not afraid. You are not afraid. If it had been he, I wouldn't have feared anything. I would have nursed him day and night till—till I made him care for me."

"Hush, dear Cecil," said Rosamond, with great difficulty. "I know you would, and so would he have done for you, only the cruel fever kept you apart."

"The fever! He had it?"

"Yes, he *had* it."

"But he is better. I am better. Let me be taken to him. His mother is not there now. I heard them say she was in Frank's room. Call papa. He will carry me."

"Oh! poor, poor Cecil. His mother only went to Frank when he did not need her any more." And Rosamond hid her face on the bed, afraid to look.

Cecil lay back so white, that Grindstone approached with some drops, but this made her spring up, crying, "No, no, don't come near me! You never told me! You deceived me?"

"Don't, don't ma'am—my dear Miss Charnock—now. It was all for your best. You would not have been here now."

"And then I should be with him. Rosamond, send her away, I can't bear her. She sent him away from me that night. I heard her."

"My dear Cecil, this will not do. You are making your father dreadfully unhappy. Dear Raymond stayed with you till he really could not sit up any longer, and then he kissed you."

"Kissed me! Oh, where? Did you see? No, don't ask Grindstone. She made me think he had left me, and fancy—oh, Rosamond! such—such things! And all the time——"

The moaning became an anguish of distress, unable to weep, like terrible pain, as the poor young thing writhed in Rosamond's arms. It was well that this one sister understood what had been in Cecil's heart, and did believe in her love for Raymond. Rosamond, too, had caressing power beyond any other of the family, and thus she could better deal with the sufferer, striving, above all, to bring tears by what she whispered to her as she held her to her bosom. They were a terrible storm at last, but Cecil clung to Rosamond through all, absolutely screaming when Grindstone came near; poor Grindstone who had been so devoted though mistaken. Weakness, however, after the first violent agitation was soothed, favoured a kind of stunned torpor, and Cecil lay still, except when her maid tried to do anything for her, and then the passion returned. When old Susan Alston came with a message, she was at once recognized and monopolized, and became the only servant whom she would suffer about her.

The inconvenience was great, but relapse was such an imminent danger, that it was needful to give up everything to her; and Mr. Charnock, regarding his daughter's sufferings as the only ones worth consideration, seemed to pursue Rosamond the instant

she had sat down by the still feeble, weary, convalescent Terry, imploring her to return to Cecil with the irresistible force of tearful eyes and piteous descriptions; and as Terry had a week's start in recovery, and was not a widow under twenty-two, he had to submit, and lie as contentedly as he could in his solitude.

Susan could be better spared to Cecil's morbid fancy of being waited on by her who had attended her husband, for Miles and Anne were sufficient for Mrs. Poynsett and Frank. The long-sundered husband and wife scarcely saw each other, except over Frank's bed, and Mr. Charnock was on the Captain's hands whenever he came beyond it. On the Wednesday, however, Julius, who had only once spoken to his brother alone, came up to the breakfast-table where he and Mr. Charnock were sitting, and hurt the feelings of the latter by first asking for Frank. "He had slept all night, and only half woke when Miles and Anne changed watch and gave him beef-tea. Cecil, very moaning and restless—more fever about her, poor dear. When would Lady Rosamond come up? —she was asking for her." When she had seen to a few things at home, given her brother his breakfast, and seen to poor Herbert; he had had a dreadful night, and that Cranstoun *would* shut the window unless some one defended him. Mr. Charnock began to resume his daughter's symptoms, when Julius, at the first pause, said:

"Have you finished, Miles? Could you speak to me in the library a minute? I beg your pardon, Mr. Charnock, but my time is short."

"I hope—I quite understand. Do not let me be in your way."

And the brothers repaired to the library, where Julius's first words were, "Miles, you must make up your mind. They are getting up a requisition to you to stand for Wilsbro'."

"To me?"

"You are the most obvious person, and the feeling for dear Raymond is so strong as to prevent any contest. Whitlock told Bindon yesterday that you should have no trouble."

"I can't. It is absurd. I know nothing about it. My poor mother bred up Raymond for nothing else. Don't you remember how she made him read history, volumes upon volumes, while I was learning nothing but the ropes. I declare, Julius, there he goes."

"Who?"

"Why, that old ass, down to hunt up poor Rosamond; I don't believe he thinks there's anyone in the world but his daughter. I declare I'll hail him and stop him."

"No, no, Miles, Rosamond can take care of herself. She won't come till she has seen to her patients down there; and, after all, Cecil's is the saddest case, poor thing. To return. If you don't take to politics in the end, I think you should let them put you in

now, if only as a stop-gap, or we shall get some one whom it may not be easy to get rid of."

"There's something in that, but I can't accept without knowing my position, and I would not utter a word to disturb my mother till it occurs to her of herself."

"Now that Frank is better?"

"No. It will all come on her soon enough."

"Would you stand if she made it right for you?"

"I can't tell. There would be no punishment so great to my poor Anne as to be dragged into society, and I don't know how she would bear it, even if she had no scruples. We never thought of anything but settling in Glen Fraser, only I wanted her to know you all. If that poor Cecil only had a child we could be free to go back. Poor Anne!"

"Do you think she is still as homesick as at first?"

"Well, not quite, perhaps; but I never can get to talk to her, and I know it is a terrible sacrifice to her to live here at all, and I won't have her forced into a style of thing against her conscience. If they come to me, I shall tell them take Mr. Bowater."

"Poor Mr. Bowater! He will have little heart."

"Who else is there? That fellow Moy would like it, I suppose."

"That fellow Moy may have to change his note," said Julius. "I think we have the means of clearing Archie, when we can see how to use them."

Miles gave a sort of leap as he stood by the fire.

"Tell me. Archie! I had no heart to write to him, poor fellow."

"Write to him by all means, but say nothing here." And Julius briefly repeated what Gadley had said.

"I don't see that the scoundrel Moy deserves any consideration."

"I don't know whether he does; but he has a good wife, ailing and sickly, and a daughter. He has lived in good report these many years, and I think it is due to him and to old Proudfoot not to spread the report before giving him warning. In fact, I am not sure whether we could proceed against him as things stand."

"It is just what Raymond would have known," said Miles, with a sigh; "but you are right, Julius, one ought to give him fair play. Ah! what's that, Jenkins? —Note from Lord Belfort? Wait for an answer. Can't they give one any peace?"

While Miles was reluctantly answering his note, Julius, resolving to act before he was forbidden, mounted to Frank's room, requested to speak with his mother, and propelled her into the outer room, leaving Anne on guard.

"Now then, my dear," she said, "I have known a talk must soon come. You have all been very good to me to leave it so long."

"I am come now without poor Miles's knowledge or consent," said Julius, "because it is necessary for him to know what to do."

"He will give up the navy," said his mother. "O Julius! does he require to be told that he——?" and she laid her head on her son's shoulder.

"It is what he cannot bear to be told; but what drives me on is that Whitlock tells me that the Wilsbro' people want to bring him in at once, as the strongest proof of their feeling for Raymond."

"Yes," she raised her head proudly, "of course he must come forward. He need have no doubt. Send him to me, Julius, I will tell him to open letters, and put matters in train. Perhaps you will write to Graves for me, if he does not like it, poor boy."

She had roused herself into the woman of business, and when Miles, after some indignation at her having been disturbed, obeyed the summons, she held out her arms, and became the consoler.

"Come, my boy," she said, "we must face it sooner or later. You must stand foremost and take up his work for him."

"Oh, mother! mother! you know how little I am able," said Miles, covering his face with his hands.

"You do not bring his burthened heart to the task," she said. "If you had watched and felt with him, as perhaps only his mother could, you would know that I can be content that the long heart-ache should have ceased, where the weary are at rest. Yes, Miles, I feel as if I had put him to sleep after a long day of pain, as when he was a little child."

They hardened themselves to the discussion, Mrs.

Poynsett explaining what she thought the due of her eldest son, only that Cecil's jointure would diminish the amount at her disposal. Indeed, when she was once aroused, she attended the most fully; but when Miles found her apologizing for only affording him the little house in the village, he cried out with consternation.

"My dear," she said, "it is best so; I will not be a burthen on you young ones. I see the mistake."

"I know," stammered Miles, "my poor Anne is not up to your mark—not clever like you or Jenny —but I thought you did like her pretty handy ways."

"I feel them and love them with all my heart; but I cannot have her happiness and yours sacrificed to me. Yes, you boys love the old nest; but even Julius and Rose rejoice in their own, and you must see what she really wishes, not what she thinks her duty. Take her out walking, you both need it badly enough."

They ventured to comply, and eluding Mr. Charnock, went into the Park, silvery with the unstaunched dews, and the leaves floating down one by one like golden rain.

"Not much like the Bush," said Miles.

"No," was all Anne durst say.

"Poor Nan, how dreary it must have looked to you last year!"

"I am afraid I wrote very complaining letters?"

"Not complaining, but a direful little effort at con-

tent, showing the more piteously, because involuntarily, what a mistake I had made."

"No, no mistake. Indeed, Miles, it was not. Nothing else would have cured me of the dreadful uncharitableness which was the chief cause of my unhappiness, and if I had not been so forlorn, I should never have seen how good and patient your mother was with me. Yes, I mean it. I read over my old diary and saw how tiresome and presumptuous I was, and how wonderfully she bore with me, and so did Julius and Rosamond, while all the time I fancied them—no Christians."

"Ah! you child! You know I would never have done it if I had known you were to be swamped among brides. At any rate this poor old place doesn't look so woefully dismal and hateful to you now."

"It could not, where you are, and where I have so many to know and love."

"You can bear the downfall of our Bush schemes?"

"Your duty is here now."

"Are you grieved, little one?"

"I don't know. I should like to have seen mamma; but she does not need me now as your mother does."

"Then you are willing to be her daughter?"

"I have tried hard, and she is very kind; but I am far too dull and ignorant for her. I can only wait upon her; but when she has you and Julius to talk to, my stupidity will not matter."

"Would you be content to devote yourself to her, instead of making a home of our own?"

"She can't be left alone in that great house."

"The question is, can you be happy in it? or do you wish for a house to ourselves?"

"You don't, Miles, it is your own home."

"That's not the question."

"Miles, why do you look at me so?"

"I was told to ascertain your wishes."

"I don't wish anything—now I have you—but to be a comfort to your mother. That is my first earthly wish just now."

"If that be earthly, it has a touch of the heavenly," muttered Miles to himself. "You will make it clear to mother then that you like to go on with her?"

"If she does not mind having me."

"And Julius says it really cheered our dear Raymond to think you would be the one to look after her! But that's not all, Nanny, I've only till to-morrow to decide whether I am to be member for Wilsbro'."

"Is that a duty?"

"Not such a duty as to bind me if it were altogether repugnant to you. I was not brought up for it, and may be a mere stop-gap, but it is every man's duty to come to the front when he is called for, and do his utmost for his country in Parliament, I suppose, as much as in action."

"I see; but it would be leaving your mother alone a great deal."

"Not necessarily. You could stay here part of the time, and I go backwards and forwards, as Raymond did before his marriage."

"It would be better than your being at sea."

"But remember," he added, "there is much that can't be shirked. I don't mean currying popularity, but if one is in that position, there's no shutting oneself up. It becomes a duty to keep society going, and give it the sort of tone that a nice woman can do. Do you see?"

"I think I do. Julius said so once."

"So if we are to have such tears and despair as there were about the ball in the Chimæra, then——"

"I was wrong then," said Anne. "I did not behave at all well to you all that time, dear Miles; I have been sorry for it ever since I understood."

"It was not you, little one, it was Mr. Pilgrim."

"No, it was not Mr. Pilgrim who made me cross."

"Yes, it was. He exacted pledges that he had no right to lay on your conscience, and your poor little conscience was in terrible straits, and I was too angry to feel for it. Never mind all that; you have done with the fellow, and understand better now."

"He thought he was right, and that only such abstinence could guard me. And, Miles, a promise is a promise, and I do not think I ought to dance or play at cards. It is not that I think them wrong for others, but I cannot break my word. Except those—I will do whatever is fitting for your wife."

"Spoken like a heroine!"

"I don't think I could ever give a tone. Rosamond could, if she tried, but I have no readiness and no training; but I do see that there is more good in being friendly, like Jenny Bowater, than in avoiding everything, and as long as one does it because it is right and loving, it can't be the world or worldliness."

It was not lucidly expressed, but it satisfied the Captain.

"All right, my bonnie Nance, I'll promise on my side never to ask you to go against your real conscience, and if you must have a Pope, I had rather it were Pope Julius than Pope Pilgrim."

"Don't, Miles. Popes are all wrong, and I don't know whether Mr. Pilgrim would give the right hand of fellowship to Julius."

Miles chuckled. "You may think yourself lucky you have not to adjust that question, Madam Nan."

"There's the quarter chiming. Frank will want his beef-tea."

Presently after Miles laid his hand on his mother's shoulder, and said, "Mother, here's a daughter who thinks you want to turn us out because she is too slow and stupid for your home child." And he drew Anne up blushing as if she were his freshly-won bride.

"My dear, are you sure you don't want to go away from the old woman? Should you not be happier with him all to yourself?"

"I could not be happy if you were left," said Ann
"May I go on as we did last winter? I will try to d
better now I have him to help me."

"My own dear child!"

That was the way Anne forgot her own people ar
her father's house.

CHAPTER XIII.

HERBERT'S VICTORY.

"And of our scholars let us learn
Our own forgotten lore."

Keble.

"JOAN, Jenny, dearest old Joanie!" It was eagerly spoken, though the voice was strangely altered that came from behind the flowered curtain of that big bed, while the fingers drew it back, and Rollo raised his black muzzle near at hand. "Oh, Jenny! have you come to me?"

"My dear, dear, poor boy!"

"No kissing—it's not safe," and he burrowed under the sheet.

"As if I did not mean to do more for you than that! Besides, it is not catching."

"So I said, till it caught me. What a jolly cold hand! You've not come in cold and hungry though?"

"No, indeed, Rosamond forced me to sit down to a whole spread. As if one could eat with a knot in one's throat."

"Mind you do, Jenny—it was what did for me. The Rector ordered me never to go about unfed; but one could not always—and there was something I have to tell you that drove all the rest out——"

"Dear Herbs! Papa can't talk of what you have done without tears. He longed to come, but we could not leave Mamma without one of us, and he thought I could do the most for you. I have a note for you."

"Forgiving me?"

"I should *think* so. It is in my bag——"

"No, not this moment; I like to know it. And Mammy—poor Mammy——"

"She is as comforted as she can be that you have Cranky and me; and then Papa's being proud of you has cheered her—oh! so much."

"I'm glad they can comfort themselves——"

"But Herbert, dear, you must be much better; I did not expect to see you so well."

"I'm not so bad between whiles," said Herbert, wearily. "And, while I can, I've got something to tell you that will make it up to you, and a great deal more."

"Make it up?" said Jenny, looking with bewildered eyes at the dear face.

"Yes, I made Gadley consent. The Rector has it in writing, and it will do quite as well if I die. O Jenny, woman, think of my never knowing what you had gone through!"

"Is it about Archie?" said Jenny, beginning to tremble.

"Yes. It will clear him."

"I always knew he was clear."

"Yes, but he can come back now all right. Eh! what an ass I am! I've begun at the wrong end. He wasn't drowned—it was all a mistake, Miles saw him in Africa—Cranky, I say, come to her."

"Yes, Master Herbert, you've been talking a great deal too much for your sister just off a journey. You'll get the fever on again. Miss Joanna, you ought to know better than to let him run on; I sha'n't be able to let you do nothing for him if this is the way."

"Was it too sudden, Joan?" said Herbert, wistfully, as she bent to kiss his brow with trembling lips. "I couldn't let anyone tell you but myself, while I could; but I don't seem able to go on. Is the Rector there, Cranky?"

"Yes, sir, waiting in the parlour."

"Rector," and Julius hurried in at once, "take her and tell her. I can't do it after all."

"*Is* he alive?" whispered Jenny, so much overcome that Julius had to hold her up for a moment as he led her into the other room.

"Really! She thinks me delirious," said Herbert, rather amused. "Tell her all, Rector."

"Really, Joan," said Julius, putting her into the

great chair, and holding her trembling hand, "Miles has seen him, has had him in his ship."

"And you never told me!"

"He made Miles promise not to tell."

"But he told you!"

"Yes, because it was Anne who gave the clue which led to his discovery; but when he found we all thought him dead, he laid Miles under the strictest charge to say nothing. He is on an ostrich farm in Natal, Jenny, well, and all that he ever was, and more too. He took your photograph from Miles's book."

"And I never knew," moaned Jenny, quite overcome.

"He would not be persuaded that it was not more for your peace not to know of his life, and when Miles was put on honour, what could we do? But now it is all changed. Since Herbert's discovery he need not be a banished man any more." And Julius told Jenny the manner of the discovery. She listened, evidently gathering all in, and then she asked:

"And what have you done?"

"Nothing as yet."

"Nothing! while there is this blot on Archie's name, and he is living in exile, and that Moy is revelling in prosperity. Nothing! Why don't you publish it to everyone?"

"My dear Jenny, I have only known it a week, and I have not been able to find out where Mr. Moy is."

"What, to have him taken up?"

"Taken up, no; I don't imagine he could be prosecuted after this length of time and on this kind of evidence. No, to give him warning."

"Warning? To flee away, and never clear Archie! What are you about, Julius? He ought to be exposed at once, if he cannot be made to suffer otherwise."

"Nay, Jenny, that would be hard measure."

"Hard measure," she interrupted, "what has my innocent Archie had?"

"Think of the old man, his wife and daughter, Jenny."

"She's a Proudfoot.—And that girl the scandal of the country! You want to sacrifice Archie to them, Julius?"

"You are tired and shaken, Jenny, or you would see that all I want to do is to act with common consideration and honour."

She interrupted again. "What honour do you mean? You are not making it a secret of the confessional?"

"You are misunderstanding me, Joanna," Julius gently said. "Herbert's vigil spared me from that difficulty, but——"

"Then you would have sacrificed Archie to this imaginary——"

"Hush, Jenny! I fear he is wandering again. Alas! it is the sad old *refrain!*"

As they came to the door together, Herbert's voice, under that strange change which wandering brings, was heard muttering, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." And Mrs. Cranstoun received them, with her head shaking, and tearful eyes. "It has come on again, sir; I was afraid it would be too much for him."

Herbert's prayer had been granted, inasmuch as the horrible ravings that he feared repeating never passed his lips. If he had gone down to the smoke of Tartarus to restore his sister's lover, none of its blacks were cleaving to him; but whether conscious or wandering, the one thought of his wasted year seemed to be crushing him. It was a curious contrast between poor Mr. Fuller's absence of regret for a quarter of a century's supineness, and this lad's repentance for twelve months' idleness. That his follies had been guileless in the[illegible] might be the very cause that [illegible] of repentance. His [illegible]ad been burnt out, [illegible]d no word of it [illegible]mirth with the [illegible]t the phrases [illegible]ed in a [illegible]f fever, [illegible]d patient, [illegible]se of failure [illegible]ain a hope

of surviving. He had watched too many cases not to be aware that his symptoms were those that had been almost uniformly fatal, and he noted them as a matter of course. Dr. Easterby came to see him, and was greatly touched; Herbert was responsive, but it was not the ordinary form of comfort that he needed, for his sorrow was neither terror nor despair. His heart was too warm and loving not to believe that his Heavenly Father forgave him as freely as did his earthly father; but that very hope made him the more grieved and ashamed of his slurred task, nor did he view his six weeks at Wilsbro' as any atonement, knowing it was no outcome of repentance, but of mere kindliness, and aware, as no one else could be, how his past negligence had hindered his full usefulness, so that he only saw his failures. As to his young life, he viewed it as a mortally wounded soldier does, as a mere casualty of the war, which he was pledged to disregard. He *did* perhaps like to think that the fatal night with Gadley might bring Archie back, and yet Jenny did not give him the full peace in her happiness which he had promised himself.

Joanna had suffered terribly, far more than anyone knew, and her mind did not take the revulsion as might have been expected. Her lighthouse was shining again when she thought it extinguished for ever, but her spirits could not bear the uncertainty of the spark. She could not enter into what Miles and

Julius both alike told her, of the impossibility of their mother beginning a prosecution for money embezzled ten years back, when no living witness existed, nothing but the scrap of paper written by Herbert, and signed by him and Margaret Strangeways, authorising Julius Charnock to use what had been said by the dying, half-delirious man. What would a jury say to such evidence? And when Julius said it only freed himself morally from the secrecy, poor Jenny was bitter against his scruples, even though he had never said more than that he should have been perplexed. The most bitter anti-ritualist could hardly have uttered stronger things than she thought, and sometimes said, against what seemed to her to be keeping Archie in banishment; while the brothers' reluctance to expose Mr. Moy, and blast his reputation and that of his family, was in her present frame of mind an incomprehensible weakness. People must bear the penalty of their misdeeds, families and all, and Mrs. and Miss Moy did not deserve consideration: the pretensions of the mother had always been half scorn, half thorn, to the old county families, and the fast airs of the daughter had been offensive enough to destroy all pity for her. If an action in a Court of Justice were, as Miles and Julius told her, impossible, —and she would not believe it, except on the word of a lawyer,—public exposure was the only alternative for righting Archie, and she could not, or would not, understand that they would have undergone an action

for libel rather than not do their best to clear their cousin, but that they thought it due to Mr. Moy to give him the opportunity of doing the thing himself; she thought it folly, and only giving him time and chance for baffling them.

The strange thing was, that not only when she argued with the two brothers, but when she brooded and gave way to these thoughts as she kept her watch, it probably made her less calm — for an access of restlessness and fever never failed to come on—with Herbert. Probably she was less calm externally, and the fret of face and manner communicated itself to him, for the consequences were so invariable that Cranstoun thought they proved additionally what she of course believed, that Miss Joan could not be trusted with her brother. At last Jenny, in her distress and unwillingness to abandon Herbert to Cranky's closed windows, traced cause and effect, and made a strong resolution to banish the all-pervading thought, and indeed his ever-increasing weakness and danger filled her mind so as to make this easier and easier, so that she might no longer have to confess to herself that Rollo was a safer companion, since Herbert, with a hand on that black head, certainly only derived soothing influences from those longing sympathetic eyes. And he could not but like the testimony of strong affection that came to him. The whole parish was in consternation, and inquiries, and very odd gifts,

which he was supposed to "fancy," came from all over Compton as well as from Strawyers, and were continually showering upon his nurses, so that Mrs. Hornblower and Dilemma spent their lives in mournful replies over the counter, and fifty times a day he was pronounced to be "as bad as he could be to be alive." Old servants and keepers made progresses from Strawyers, to see Master Herbert, and were terribly aggrieved because Miss Bowater kept them out of his room, as much for their sake as his; and Mrs. Cranstoun pointed to the open lattice which she believed to be killing him, as surely as it gave aches to her rheumatic shoulder.

Julius thought almost as much as Jenny could do of the means of recalling Archie; but it was necessary to wait until he could communicate with Mr. Moy, and his hands were still over-full, for though much less fatal, the fever smouldered on, both in Wilsbro' and Compton, and as St. Nicholas was a college living which had hitherto been viewed as a trump card, it might be a long time going the round of the senior fellows.

Julius had just been at poor Mrs. Fuller's, trying to help her to put her complicated affairs in order, so as to be ready for a move as soon as one daughter, who had the fever slightly, could be taken away, and he was driving home again, when he overtook Mrs. Duncombe and offered her a lift, for her step was weary. She was indeed altered, pale, with cheekbones

showing, and all the lustre and sparkle gone out of her, while her hat was as rigidly dowdy as Miss Slater's.

She roused herself to ask feebly after the remaining patients.

"Cecil is really getting better at last," he said. "Her father wants to take her to Portishead next week."

"And young Bowater?"

"No change. His strength seems to be going."

"I wouldn't pity him," sighed Bessie Duncombe; "he has only seen the best end of life, and has laid it down for something worth! I'm sure he and your brother are the enviable ones."

"Nay, Mrs. Duncombe, you have much to work for and love in this life."

"And I must go away from everything just as I had learnt to value it. Bob has taken a house at Monaco, and writes to me to bring the children to join him there!"

"At Monaco?"

"At Monaco! Yes, and I know that it is all my own fault. I might have done anything with him if I had known how. But what could you expect? I never saw my mother; I never knew a home; I was bred up at a French school, where if one was not a Roman Catholic there was not a shred of religion going. I married after my first ball. Nobody taught me anything; but I could not help having brains, so I read

and caught the tone of the day, and made my ow line, while he went on his."

"And now there is a greater work for you to d since you have learnt to do it."

"Ah! learnt too late. When habits are confirme and home station forfeited—What is there left for hi or my poor boys to do?"

"A colony perhaps—"

"Damaged goods," she said, smiling sadly.

"Then are you going?"

"As soon as I have seen this fever out, and ca dispose of the things here. I have just been to Moy office to see about getting rid of the lease."

"Is Mr. Moy come home?"

"Yes. Have you not heard?"

"What?—Not the fever?"

"No. Worse I should say. Gussie has gone c and got married to Harry Simmonds."

"The man at the training stables?"

"Yes. They put up their banns at the Union Brighton, and were married by the Registrar, the went off to Paris. They say it will kill her mothe The man is a scoundrel, who played Bob false, ar won largely by that mare. And the girl has ha the cheek to write to me," said Mrs. Duncomb warming into her old phraseology, "to *me!*—to thar me for opportunities of meeting, and to tell me sl has followed up the teaching of last year."

"What—the rights of women?"

"Ay. This is a civil marriage—not mocking her with antiquated servile vows," she says. "Ah well, it was my doing, I suppose. Clio Tallboys held forth in private, I believe, to poor Gussie, on theories that were mere talk in her, but which this poor girl has taken in earnest."

"Very sad earnest she may find it, I fear. Can I do anything for you?" as they reached the gate of Aucuba Villa.

"No, thank you, unless to get the house off my hands."

"You are alone. Will you not come and spend the evening with us?"

"That is very kind, but I have too much to do, and besides Sister Margaret is coming to spend the night with me."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Yes, Mr. Charnock, I trust I have learnt something in this spell of work. I've not been for nothing in such scenes with those Sisters and young Bowater. I'm more ignorant than half the poor things that I've heard talk of their faith and hope; but I see it is not the decorous humbug it once looked like. And now that I would have learnt, here I go to Monaco."

"You will learn. You have a work before you that will teach you."

"My boys are young enough to start with on a different tack," she said. "You will tell me—no—I'll not hinder you now. I shall see you again."

Julius was too anxious to get home to refuse to be released, much as he felt for this brave woman. The day before, Herbert had been frightfully faint and exhausted by the morning's attack of fever, but had been so still ever since that there was a shade of hope that the recurrence might not take place; and this hope grew stronger, when Jenny came into the outer-room to say that the usual time for the fever was passing so quietly in a sort of sleep that Dr. Worth seemed to think rally possible, if only there was no fresh access.

They stood over the fire, and Julius asked, "Can't you lie on the sofa, Jenny? I can stay."

"No," said Jenny, restlessly. "No, I can't. I know you have something to tell me."

"Moy has come home, Jenny. He is in terrible trouble. His daughter has eloped with young Simmonds at the training stables."

"The most appropriate end of her bringing up," said Jenny, in the hard tone it was so difficult to answer—it was so unlike herself—and her thought was that weak pity and forbearance would hinder exertions in Archie's cause. "Generous at other folks' expense," said she to herself. "Sparing the guilty and leaving the innocent to exile!"

But a moaning murmur, and Cranstoun's movement at once summoned them both to the bedside.

Alas! here was the attack that the Doctor had evidently apprehended as likely to be fatal. Hour after

hour did sister, nurse, and friend stand watching, and doing their best, their piteously-little best, while consciousness, if there was any, was far out of their reach.

Late into the night it went on, and then followed the collapse, with locked teeth, which could hardly be drawn asunder to put the stimulus hopelessly between them, and thus came the tardy December dawn, when the church-bell made Jenny bid Julius not stay but only first read the commendatory prayer.

"I thought there was a little more revival just now," he said; "his hands are warmer, and he really did swallow."

The old nurse shook her head. "That's the way before they go," said she. "Don't ye wish him, poor lamb, it makes it the harder for him."

Julius prayed the prayer, and as he tenderly laid his hand on the brow, he wondered whether he should find the half-closed eyes shut for ever on his return.

But as he went, there was a quiver of lip and flicker of eyelid, the lightening, as Cranky called it, was evidently gaining ground. Herbert's faint whisper was heard again—"Jenny!"

"Dearest!"

"The Lord's Prayer!"

She began,—his fingers tightened on hers. "Pray it for old Moy," he said; and as she paused, scarce hearing or understanding. "He—he wants it," gasped Herbert. "No! One can't pray it, without—" another pause. "Help me Jenny. Say it—O Lord,

who savedst us—forgive us. Help us to forgive from our hearts that man his trespasses. Amen."

Jenny said it. Herbert's voice sank in the Amen. He lay breathing in long gasps; but he thus breathed still when Julius came back, and Jenny told him that a few words had passed, adding—

"Julius, I will say nothing bitter again. God help me not to think it."

Did Herbert hear? Was that the reason of the calm which made the white wasted face so beautiful, and the strange soft cool hush throughout the room?

CHAPTER XIV.

SILVER HAIR.

" And how should I your true love know
From another man ?"

Friar of Orders Gray.

"PLEASE God, I can try again."

Those were the words with which Herbert Bowater looked into his Rector's face on awaking in the evening of that same December day from one of a series of sleeps, each sweeter and longer than the last, and which had borne him over the dreaded hours, without fever, and with strengthening pulse.

Julius had not ventured to leave the sick-room that whole day, and when at last he went home and sank into the chair opposite Terry, for the first time through all these weeks of trouble and tension, he burst into a flood of tears.

He had hardly made the startled lad understand that life, not death, had thus overcome him, when the door flew open, and in rushed Rosamond, crying, " Julius, Julius, come. It is he or his ghost !"

"Who? What?"

"It is your hair! At Mrs. Douglas's grave! He'll be gone! Make haste—make haste!"

He started up, letting her drag him along, but under protest. "My dear, men *do* come to have hair like mine."

"I tell you it was at our graves—our own—I touched him. I had this wreath for Raymond, and there he was, with his hat off, at the railing close to Mrs. Douglas's. I thought his back was yours, and called your name, and he started, and I saw—he had a white beard, but he was not old. He just bowed, and then went off, very fast by the other gate, towards Wilsbro'. I did call, 'Wait, wait,' but he didn't seem to hear. Oh, go, go, Julius! Make haste!"

Infected by the wild hope, Julius hurried on the road where his wife had turned his face, almost deriding himself for obeying her, when he would probably only overtake some old family retainer; but as, under the arch of trees that overhung the road, he saw a figure in the moonlight, a thrill of recognition came over him as he marked the vigorous tread of the prime of life, and the white hair visible in the moonlight, together with something utterly indescribable, but which made him call out, "Archie! Archie Douglas! wait for me!"

The figure turned. "Julius!" came in response; the two cousins' hands clasped, and there was a sob on either side as they kissed one another as brothers.

"Archie! How could you?—Come back!" was all that Julius could say, leaning breathlessly against him, and holding him tight.

"No! Do not know that I have been here. I was sent to London on business. I could not help running home in the dark. No one must know it. I am dead to them."

"No, Archie, you are not. Gadley has confessed and cleared you. Come home!"

"Cleared me!" The two arms were stretched up to the sky, and there was the sound of a mighty sob, as though the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, were relieved from an unspeakable burthen. "Say it again, Julius!"

"Gadley, on his death-bed, has confessed that Moy and Proudfoot took that money, incited by Tom Vivian."

Archie Douglas could not speak, but he turned his face towards Compton again, strode swiftly into the churchyard, and fell on his knees by his mother's grave. When at last he rose, he pointed to the new and as yet unmarked mound, and said, "Your mother's?"

"Oh no! Raymond's! We have had a terrible fever here—almost a pestilence—and we are scarcely breathing after it."

"Ah! some one in the train spoke of sickness at Wilsbro,' but I would ask no questions, for I saw faces I knew, and I would lead to no recognition. I could not stay away from getting one sight of the

old place. Miles made it all burn within me; but here's my return-ticket for the mail-train."

"Never mind return-tickets. Come home with me."

"I shall startle your mother."

"I meant my home—the Rectory. It was my wife who saw you in the churchyard, and sent me after you. She is watching for you."

Archie, still bewildered, as if spell-bound by his ticket, muttered, "I thought I should have time to walk over and look at Strawyers."

"Joanna is here."

"Julius! It is too much. You are sure I am awake? This is not the old dream!" cried the exile, grasping his cousin's arm quite painfully.

"I am a waking man, and I trust you are," said Julius. "Come into the light. No, that is not Jenny on the step. It is my Rose. Yes, here he is!"

And as they came into the stream of light from the porch, Irish Rosamond, forgetting that Archie was not a brother, caught him by both hands, and kissed him in overpowering welcome, exclaiming, "Oh, I am so glad! Come in—come in!"

There he stood, blinking in the lamplight, a tall, powerful, broad-chested figure, but hardly a hero of romance to suit Terry's fancy, after a rapid summary of the history from Rosamond. His hair and beard were as white as Julius's, and the whole face was tanned to uniform red, but no one could mistake the dazed yet intense gladness of the look. He sank into

a chair, clasped his hands over his face for a moment, then surveyed them all one by one, and said, "You told me she was here."

"She is with her brother Herbert, at Mrs. Hornblower's lodgings. No, you must wait, Archie; he has barely in the last few hours, by God's great mercy, taken a turn for the better in this fever, and I don't see how she can leave him."

"But she must hear it," cried Rosamond. "I'm going to make her or Cranky get some rest; but you ought to be the one to tell her, Julius, you that have stood by her through all."

"And aren't you burning to do so, Rosey, woman? and I think you had better, rather than that I should startle Herbert by returning; but stay, mind your own rules—eat and drink before you go, and give the same to Archie. I shall send up a note to Miles. How is Cecil?"

"Very silent and broken, poor thing. She is to see your mother to-morrow. How well it was that she kept me so late over her wreath of camellias!"

Archie submitted to wait for food and fuller information,—indeed the lady of the house manifested more impatience than he did, as she flitted about making preparations, and he sat with hands locked together over his knee, gazing fixedly at Julius, scarcely speaking though eagerly listening; and when the meal was brought in, he could not eat, only eagerly drank off a cup of scalding tea, and watched

Rosamond as if jealous of any delay over her cutlet. She did not abuse his patience.

"Now then!" she said, rising. "You shall hear something of her before long."

"Let me come to her door," entreated Archie.

And as the light shone from the window of the sick-room, Rosamond said, "Stand under that tree in the moonlight, and I will make her look out."

All was intensely quiet; Cranky fast asleep in the arm-chair in the outer-room, and Jenny sitting by the bed, watching the smooth quiet breath.

"You are to lie down on the sofa and sleep," said Rosamond, kissing her, and she shook her head. "You must. People want strength for joy as well as grief. Trust him to me, for there is some one for you to see to-morrow."

"Not Papa!" said Jenny, startled. "No, nor Phil! Tell me, Rosamond. There is only one you could look at me like that for!"

"Look out at the window."

Trembling all over, Jenny went and put her face to the lattice. The figure under the tree came nearer. Archie must have been able clearly to see her face in the moonlight. He stretched up his arms to her, then folded them together on his breast, and let himself be led away by Julius, while Jenny slid down on her knees, with her face buried, and the suppressed choking sobs made Herbert look up at Rosamond, and whisper, "It is?"

"It is," repeated Rosamond, who had thought him asleep, or entirely absorbed in the trouble of living.

"Go to her," he added.

Rosamond put her arm round her, and supported her into the next room; for, after the month of hopeless watching, the long sleeplessness and the struggle of this silent day to force her spirit to the forgiveness she had promised, and then the sudden reaction, had overpowered her, and the suppression and silence were beyond endurance. She did not even know that Herbert was awake when Rosamond brought her out into Mrs. Hornblower's room, and said, "Have it out now, my dear, no one will hear. Scream comfortably. It will do you good."

But Jenny could not even scream. She was in the excited agony when the mind is far too much for the body, and joy, unrealised, is like grief. If her brother had that day passed away, and if nothing had been heard of her lover, she would have been all calmness and resignation; but the revulsion had overcome her, and at the moment she was more conscious of strangulation than of anything else. Rosamond tended her for full half an hour, and then she seemed almost asleep, though she resisted the attempt to undress her, with the words, "I must go to Herbert."

"I will take care of Herbert," and Jenny was too much spent not to acquiesce, and fell asleep almost

before she was laid down on the bed their landlady had given up to the watchers.

Rosamond's task was a comfortable one, for every hour of sleep, every mouthful of food seemed to do its work of restoration on the sound, healthy frame, and a smile and word of thanks met her whenever she roused her patient with the inevitable spoon.

When he awoke towards morning, he asked what day it was, and when she told him, answered, "So I thought. Then I have not lost count of time."

"No, you have been wonderfully clear-headed."

"I can't see how there can have been time to write," he said. "It is true that he is come, is it not?"

"Quite true; but he came independently on business," and Rosamond told of Julius's chase, bringing a look of amusement on his face.

Jenny came in with the rising sun, pale indeed, but another creature after her rest and in the sight of the restful countenance that greeted her with a smile. The moaning, hoarse voice was gone too, it was a faint shadow of Herbert's own tones that said, "Is not this good, Jenny? I didn't think to have seen it."

"My Herbert, you have given him back! You have given me the heart to be glad!"

"You must go and see him," said Herbert.

Jenny looked wistful and undecided; but Julius entered to say that she must come at once, for Archie must go back to London by the ten o'clock

train to an appointment, and could not return for two days.

Herbert smiled her away, for he was still in a state where it was not possible to bear any engrossing of his head-nurse, and the lover's absence was, even to his unselfishness, good news.

Rosamond could not refrain from the pleasure of peeping down the little dark stair as Archie and his Jenny met in the doorway, and she walked demurely in their rear, wondering whether other eyes saw as much as she did in the manner in which Jenny hung on his arm. She left them to their dewy walk in the Rectory garden to the last minute at which breakfast could be swallowed, and told Jenny that she was to drive him in the pony-carriage to Hazlett's Gate; she would take care of Herbert.

"You ought to be asleep, you know," said Jenny.

"My dear, I couldn't sleep! There's a great deal better than sleep! Is not Herbert going to get well? and aren't you jolly again and Archie back again? Sleep!—why I want to have wings and clap them—and more than all, is not Mr. Charnock off and away to-morrow? Sleep indeed!—I should like to see myself so stupid."

"Mr. Charnock?" interrogatively said Archie.

"The head of the family—the original Charnock of Dunstone," said Rosamond, who was in wild spirits, coming on a worn-out body and mind, and therefore perfectly unguarded. "Don't shake your head at me,

Jenny, Archie is one of the family, and that makes you so, and I must tell you of his last performance. You know he is absolutely certain that his dear daughter is more infallible than all the Popes, even since the Council, or than anybody but himself, and that whatever goes wrong here is the consequence of Julius's faith in Dr. Easterby. So, when poor Cecil, uneasy in her mind, began asking about the illness at Wilsbro', he enlivened her with a prose about misjudging, through well-intentioned efforts of clerical philanthropy to interfere with the sanitary condition of the town—so that wells grew tainted, &c., all from ignorant interference. Poor man, he heard a little sob, and looked round, and there was Cecil in a dead faint. He set all the bells ringing, and sent an express for me."

"But wasn't he furious with Anne for mentioning drains at all?"

"My dear Joan, don't you know how many old women there are of both sorts, who won't let other people look over the wall at what they gloat on in private? However, he had his punishment, for he really thought that the subject had been too much for her delicacy, and simply upset her nerves."

"When was this?"

"Four or five days ago. She is better; but has said not a word more about it. She is nothing like strong enough, even for so short a journey as to Portishead; but they say change will be the best

thing for her, and the coming down into the family would be too sad."

"Poor thing! Yes indeed," said Jenny; and, feeling universally benevolent, she added, "give her my love," a thing which so sincere a person could hardly have said a few weeks ago.

Reserve was part of Cecil's nature, and besides, her father was almost always with her; but when she had been for the first time dressed in crape up to her waist, with the tiniest of caps perched toy-like on the top of her passive head, the sight upset him completely, and muttering, "Good heavens!—a widow at twenty-two!" he hid himself from the sight over some business transactions with Mrs. Poynsett and Miles.

Rosamond seized the opportunity of bringing Julius in to pay his farewell visit, and presently Cecil said, "Julius, I should be much obliged if you would tell me the real facts about this illness."

"Do," said Rosamond. "Her half knowledge is most wearing."

He gently told her what science had pronounced.

"Then it was Pettitt's well?" she said.

"They tell us that this was the immediate cause of the outbreak; but there would probably have been quite as much fatal illness the first time any infectious disease came in. The whole place was in a shameful state, and you were the only people who tried to mitigate it."

"And did worse harm, because we would not listen

to advice," said Cecil. "Julius, I have a great deal of money; can't I do anything now? My father wants me to give a donation to the Church as a memorial of *him*, but, somehow, I don't feel as if I deserved to do that."

"I see what you mean, Cecil, but the town is being rated to set the drainage to rights, and it will thus be done in the most permanent and effectual way. There are some orphans who might be saved from the Union, about whom I thought of asking you to help."

Cecil asked the details of the orphans, and the consultation over them seemed to be prolonged by her because, even now, she could not resolve to go below the surface. It lasted until her father came to ask whether she were ready to go with him to Mrs. Poynsett's sitting-room. She looked very fragile and childish as she stood up, clinging to his arm to help her wavering, uncertain step, holding out her hand to Julius, and saying, "I shall see you again."

He was a little disappointed to see her no older, and no warmer; having gone thus far, it seemed as if she might have gone further and opened more. Perhaps he did not understand how feelings, naturally slow, were rendered slower by the languor of illness, which made them more oppressive than acute.

As Mr. Charnock and his daughter knocked, the door was opened by Miles, who merely gave his hand, and went down. Frank, who had been reading in a

low easy chair by the fire, drew it close to his mother for her, and retreated to another seat, and the mother and daughter-in-law exchanged a grave kiss. Cecil attempted some civility about the chair, to which poor Frank replied, "I'm afraid it is of no use to speak to me, Cecil, Miles can only just make me hear."

Regret for his misfortune, and inquiry as to the chances of restoration, were a possible topic. Mr. Charnock gave much advice about aurists, and examples of their success or non-success; and thence he diverged to the invalid-carriage he had secured, and his future plans for expediting his daughter's recovery. Meanwhile Mrs. Poynsett and Cecil sat grave, dry-eyed, and constrained, each feeling that in Mr. Charnock's presence the interview was a nullity, yet neither of them able to get rid of him, nor quite sure that she would have done so if she could.

He, meanwhile, perfectly satisfied with his own considerate tact, talked away the allotted half-hour, and then pronounced his daughter pale and tired. She let him help her to rise, but held Mrs. Poynsett's hand wistfully, as if she wished to say something but could not; and all Mrs. Poynsett could bring out was a hope of hearing how she bore the journey. It was as if they were both frozen up. Yet the next moment Cecil was holding Frank's hand in a convulsive clasp, and fairly pulling him down to exchange a kiss, when he found her tears upon his

cheek. Were they to his misfortune, or to his much-increased resemblance to his brother?

Mr. Charnock kept guard over her, so that her other farewells were almost as much restrained as these, and though she hung on Rosamond's neck, and seemed ready to burst forth with some fervent exclamation, he hovered by, saying, "My dear child, don't, don't give way to agitation. It does you honour, but it cannot be permitted at such a moment. Lady Rosamond, I appeal to your unfailing good sense to restrain her emotion."

"I haven't any good sense, and I think it only hurts her to restrain her emotion," said Rosamond, with one of her little stamps, pressing Cecil in her arms. "There, there, my dear, cry—never mind, if it will comfort your poor heart."

"Lady Rosamond! This is—Cecil, my dear child! Your resolution—your resignation. And the boxes are packed, and we shall be late for the train!"

Mr. Charnock was a little jealous of Lady Rosamond as a comforter preferred to himself, and he spoke in a tone which Cecil had never resisted. She withdrew herself from Rosamond, still tearless, though her chest heaved as if there were a great spasm in it; she gave her hand to Miles, and let him lead her to the carriage; and so Raymond's widowed bride left Compton Poynsett enfolded in that strange silence which some called sullenness and pride; others, more merciful, stunned grief.

Poor Cecil! there was less pity to be spared to her because of the intense relief it was to be free from her father, and to be able to stand in a knot consulting on the steps, without his coming out to find out what they were talking about, and to favour them with some Dunstone counsel.

The consultation was about Mr. Moy. It was determined that since Archie was in England, it would be better not to wait till Herbert was recovered, but that Miles and Julius should go together at once to see what effect they could produce on him.

They drove together to his office. He was a tall man, a few years over forty, and had hitherto been portly and well-preserved, with a certain serene air of complacent prosperity about him, that had always been an irritation to the county families, with whom he tried to assert an equality; but as he rose to greet the brothers, there was a bent and shrunken look about him: the hair on his temples had visibly whitened, his cheeks seemed to have sunk in, and there were deep furrows on them. Altogether he had grown full twenty years older in appearance since he had stood proposing a popular toast at the dinner at the Town Hall. There was something nervous and startled in his grey eye, as he saw them enter, though he tried to assume his usual half-bland, half-easy manner.

"Good morning, Captain Charnock Poynsett. Good morning, Mr. Charnock, I hope I see you well?" the words faltering a little, as neither sailor nor

clergyman took notice of his proffered hand ; but he continued his inquiries after the convalescents, though neither inquired in return after Mrs. Moy, feeling, perhaps, that they would rather not hear a very sad account of her state just before letting their inevitable Nemesis descend; also, not feeling inclined for reciprocal familiarity, and wanting to discourage the idea that Miles came for political purposes.

"It has been a terrible visitation," said Moy, when he had been reduced to replying to himself.

"It has," said Julius. "Perhaps you have heard that your tenant, Gadley, is dead?"

"Yes, I did hear it. A very melancholy thing—the whole family swept away," said Mr. Moy, his eye again betraying some uneasiness, which Julius increased by saying—

"We thought it right that you should hear that he made a disclosure on his death-bed."

"Indeed!" Mr. Moy sat erect—the hard, keen, watchful lawyer.

"A disclosure that nearly affects the character of Mr. Archibald Douglas," proceeded Julius.

"May I ask what this may be?"

"Mr. Gadley then informed me that he had been in the outer room, behind his desk, at the time when Mr. Douglas brought in the letter from my mother, containing the missing cheque, and that after Douglas was gone, he heard Mr. Vivian propose to those within to appropriate the amount to their own debts."

"Pardon me, Mr. Charnock, this is a very serious charge to bring on the authority of a man in a raving fever. Was any deposition taken before a magistrate?"

"No," said Julius. "Mr. Lipscombe was fetched, but he was unable to speak at the time. However, on reviving, he spoke as is thus attested," and he showed Herbert Bowater's slip of paper.

"Mr. Charnock," said Mr. Moy, "without the slightest imputation on the intentions of yourself or of young Mr. Bowater, I put it to yourself and Captain Charnock Poynsett, whether you could go before a jury with no fuller attestation than you have in your hand. We know what Mr. Charnock and Mr. Bowater are. To a jury they would simply appear—pardon me—a young clergyman, his still more youthful curate, and a sister of mercy, attaching importance to the words of a delirious man; and juries have become very incredulous in such cases."

"We shall see that," said Miles sharply.

The more cautious," added Mr. Moy, "when it is the raking up of a matter eleven years old, where the witnesses are mostly dead, and where the characters of two gentlemen, also deceased would be implicated. Believe me, sir, this firm—I speak as its present head—will be rejoiced to make any compensation to Mrs. Poynsett for what went astray while coming to their hands. It has been our desire to do so from the very first, as letters, of which I have copies, testify; but

our advances were met in a spirit of enmity, which may perhaps be laid aside now."

"No so-called compensation can be accepted, but the clearing of Douglas's character," said Miles.

"It is a generous feeling," said Mr. Moy, speaking apparently most dispassionately, though Julius saw his hands trembling below the table; "but even if the word of this delirious man were sufficient, have you reflected, Captain Charnock Poynsett, on the unequal benefit of justifying—allowing that you could justify—a young man who has been dead and forgotten these eleven years and has no relation living nearer, than yourself, at the expense of those also gone, but who have left relations who could ill bear to suffer from such a revelation?"

"Justice is justice, whether a man be dead or alive," said Miles; "and Douglas is alive to demand his right."

"Alive!" cried Mr. Moy, starting violently. "Alive! Archie Douglas alive!"

"Alive, and in England," said Julius. "He slept in my house the night before last. He never was in the *Hippolyta* at all, but has been living in Africa all these years of exile."

Mr. Moy's self-command and readiness were all gone. He sank back in his chair, with his hands over his face. The brothers looked at one another, fearing he might have a stroke; but he revived in a moment, yet with a totally different expression on his counte-

nance. The keen, defensive look was gone, there was only something piteously worn and supplicating in the face, as he said—

"Then, gentlemen, I cannot resent anything you may do. Believe me, but for the assurance of his death, I should have acted very differently long ago. I will assist you in any way you desire in reinstating Mr. Douglas in public opinion, only, if it be possible, let my wife be spared. She has recently had the heaviest possible blow ; she can bear no more."

"Mr. Moy, we will do nothing vindictive. We can answer for my mother and Douglas," began Julius; but Miles, more sternly, would not let his brother hold out his hand, and said—

"You allow, then, the truth of Gadley's confession ?"

"What has he confessed ?" said Moy, still too much the lawyer not to see that his own complicity had never yet been stated.

Julius laid before him his own written record of Gadley's words, not only involving Moy in the original fraud, but showing how he had bribed the only witness to silence ever since. The unhappy man read it over, and said—

"Yes, Mr. Charnock, it is all true. I cannot battle it further. I am at your mercy. I would leave you to proclaim the whole to the world; if it were not for my poor wife and her father, I would be glad to do so. Heaven knows how this has hung upon me for years."

"I can well believe it," said Julius, not to be hindered now from grasping Mr. Moy's hand.

It seemed to be a comfort now to tell the whole story in detail. Moy, the favoured and trusted articled clerk at first, then the partner, the lover and husband of the daughter, had been a model of steadiness and success so early, that when some men's youthful follies are wearing off, he had begun to weary of the monotony of the office, and after beginning as Mentor to his young brother-in-law, George Proudfoot, had gradually been carried along by the fascination of Tom Vivian's society to share in the same perilous pursuits, until both had incurred a debt to him far beyond their powers, while he was likewise so deeply involved, that no bonds of George Proudfoot would avail him.

Then came the temptation of Mrs. Poynsett's cheque, suggested, perhaps in jest, by Vivian, but growing on them as the feasibility of using it became clear. It was so easy to make it appear to Archie Douglas that the letter was simply an inquiry for the lost one. Mr. Proudfoot, the father, was out of reach; Mrs. Poynsett would continue to think the cheque lost in the post; and Tom Vivian undertook to get it presented for payment through persons who would guard against its being tracked. The sum exceeded the debt, but he would return the overplus to them, and they both cherished the hope of returning it with interest. Indeed, it had been but a half consent on

the part of either, elicited only by the dire alternative of exposure; the envelope and letter were destroyed, and Vivian carried off the cheque to some of the Jews, with whom he had had only too many transactions, and they never met him again.

Moy's part all along had been half cowardice, half ambition. The sense of that act and of its consequences had gnawed at his heart through all his success; but to cast himself down from his position as partner and son-in-law of Mr. Proudfoot, the keen, clever, trusted, confidential agent of half the families around—to let his wife know his shame and that of her brother, and to degrade his daughter into the daughter of a felon—was more than he could bear; and he had gone on trying to drown the sense of that one lapse in the prosperity of his career and his efforts to place his daughter in the first ranks of society. No doubt the having done an injury to the Poynsett family had been the true secret of that enmity, more than political, which he had always shown to Raymond; and after thinking Gadley safer out of that office, and having yielded to his solicitations and set him up at the Three Pigeons, he had been almost compelled to bid for popularity by using his position as a magistrate to protect the blackguardism of the town. He had been meant for better things, and had been dragged on against his conscience and judgment by the exigencies of his unhappy secret; and when the daughter, for whose

sake he had sacrificed his better self, had only been led by her position into the follies and extravagances of the worst part of the society into which she had been introduced, and threw herself into the hands of a dissipated gambler, to whom her fortune made her a desirable prey—truly his sin had found him out.

His fight at first had been partly force of habit, but he was so entirely crushed that they could only have pity on him when he put himself so entirely in their hands, only begging for forbearance to his wife and her aged father, and entreating that principal, interest, and compound interest might at once be tendered to Mrs. Poynsett.

The brothers could answer for nothing. Archie must decide for himself what he would accept as restoration of his character, and Mrs. Poynsett could alone answer as to whether she would accept the compensation. But neither of them could be hard on one so stricken and sorrowful, and they did not expect hardness from their mother and cousin, especially so far as old Mr. Proudfoot and his daughter were concerned.

That the confession was made, and that Archie should be cleared, was enough for Julius to carry to Herbert's room, while Miles repaired to his mother. It was known in the sick room where the brothers had been, and Julius was watched as he crossed the street by Jenny's eager eye, and she met him at the door of the outer room with a face of welcome.

"Come in and tell us all," she said. "I see it is good news."

Herbert was quite well enough to bear good news in full detail as he lay, not saying much, but smiling his welcome, and listening with ears almost as eager as his sister's. And as Julius told of the crushed and broken man, Jenny's tears rose to her eyes, and she pressed her brother's hand and whispered, "Thanks, dear boy!"

"Small thanks to me."

"Yes, I can enjoy it now," said Jenny; "thanks to you for forcing the bitterness out of me."

"Can you bear a little more good news, Herbert?" said Julius. "Who do you think is to have St. Nicholas'?"

"Not William Easterby? That's too good to be true."

"But so it is. All the Senior Fellows dropped it like a red-hot coal."

"I thought Dwight wanted to marry?"

"Yes, but the lady's friends won't hear of his taking her there; so it has come down to young Easterby. He can't be inducted of course yet; but he has written to say he will come down on Saturday and take matters in hand."

"The services on Sunday? Oh!" said Herbert, with as great a gasp of relief as if he had been responsible for them; and, indeed, Rosamond declared that both her husband and Mr. Bindon

looked like new men since Wilsbro' was off their backs.

Archie was coming back that evening. Jenny much longed to show her two treasures to each other, but it was a useless risk for the healthy man, and the sick one was too weak and tired to wish for a new face, or the trouble of speaking; nay, he could not easily bring himself to cheerful acquiescence in even his favourite Lady Rose taking his sister's place to set her free for an evening with Archie at the Hall.

Mrs. Poynsett was in the drawing-room. She had taken courage to encounter the down-stair associations, saying she would make it no sadder for the dear boy than she could help, and so Miles had carried her down to meet one who had been always as one of her own sons.

And thus it was that she gathered him into her embrace, while the great strong man, only then fully realising all the changes, sobbed uncontrollably beside her.

"My boy, my poor Archie," she said, "you are come at last. Did you not know you still had a mother to trust to?"

"I ought to have known it," said Archie, in a choked voice. "Oh that I had seen Jenny in London!"

For indeed it had become plain that it had been his flight that had given opportunity and substance to the accusation. If he had remained, backed by

the confidence of such a family as the Poynsetts, Gadley would have seen that testimony in his favour would be the safer and more profitable speculation; and Moy himself, as he had said, would have testified to the innocence of a living man on the spot, though he had let the blame rest on one whom he thought in the depths of the sea. Archie's want of moral courage had been his ruin. It had led him to the scene of temptation rather than resist his companions, and had thus given colour to the accusation, and in the absence of both Joanna and of his cousins, it had prevented him from facing the danger.

This sense made him the more willing to be forbearing, when, after dinner, the whole council sat round to hear in full the history of the interview with Mr. Moy. Anne taking up her position beside Frank, with whom, between her pencil and the finger-alphabet, she had established such a language as to make her his best interpreter of whatever was passing in the room.

"One could not help being sorry for Moy," said Miles, as he concluded; "he turns out to be but half the villain after all, made so rather by acquiescence than by his own free will."

"But reaping the profit," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"Yes, though in ignorance of the injury he was doing, and thus climbing to a height that makes his fall the worse. I am sorry for old Proudfoot too,"

added Julius. "I believe they have not ventured to tell him of his granddaughter's marriage."

"I do not think the gain to me would be at all equal to the loss to them," said Archie. "Exposure would be ruin and heartbreak there, and I don't see what it would do for me"

"My dear Archie!" exclaimed both Mrs. Poynsett and Joanna, in amazement.

"So long as you and Mr. Bowater are satisfied, I care for little else," said Archie.

"But your position, my dear," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"We don't care much about a man's antecedents, within a few years, out in the colonies, dear Aunt Julia," said Archie, smiling.

"You aren't going back?"

"That depends," said Archie, his eyes seeking Joanna's; "but I don't see what there is for me to do here. I'm spoilt for a solicitor anyway——"

"We could find an agency, Miles, couldn't we?—or a farm—or——"

"Thank you, dear aunt," said Archie; "I don't definitely answer, because Mr. Bowater must be consulted; but I have a business out there that I can do, and where I can make a competence that I can fairly offer to Jenny here. If I came home, as I am now, I should only prey on you in some polite form, and I don't think Jenny would wish for that alternative. I must go back anyway, as I have told her, and whether

to save for her, or to make a home for her there, it must be for her to decide."

They looked at Jenny. She was evidently prepared; for though her colour rose a little, her frank eyes looked at him with a confiding smile.

"But we must have justice done to you, my dear boy, whether you stay with us or not," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"That might have been done if I had not been fool enough to run away," said Archie; "having done so, the mass of people will only remember that there has been something against me, in spite of any justification. It is not worth while to blast Moy's character, and show poor old Proudfoot what a swindler his son was, just for that. The old man was good to me. I should like to let it rest while he lives. If Moy would sign such an exculpation of me as could be shown to Mr. Bowater, and any other whom it might concern, I should be quite willing to have nothing told publicly, at least as long as the old gentleman lives."

"I think Archie is right," said Miles, in the pause, with a great effort.

"Yes, right in the highest sense of the word," said Julius.

"It is Christian," Anne breathed across to her husband.

"I don't like it," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"Let that scoundrel go unhung!" burst from

Frank, who had failed to catch the spirit of his interpreter.

"I don't like it in the abstract, mother," said Miles; "but you and Frank have not seen the scoundrel in his beaten down state, and, as Archie says, it is hard to blacken the memory of either poor George Proudfoot or Tom Vivian, who have fathers to feel it for them."

"Poor Tom Vivian's can hardly be made much blacker," said Mrs. Poynsett, "nor are Sir Harry's feelings very acute; but perhaps poor old Proudfoot ought to be spared, and there are considerations as to the Vivian family. Still, I don't see how to consent to Archie going into exile again with this stigma upon him. I am sure Raymond would not, and I do not think Mr. Bowater will."

"Dear Aunt Julia," said Archie, affectionately, coming across to her, "it was indeed exile before, when I was dead to all of you; but can it be so now the communication is open, and when I am making or winning my home?" and his eyes brought Jenny to him by her side.

"Yes, dear Mrs. Poynsett," she said, holding her hand, "I am sure he is right, and that it would spoil all our own happiness to break that poor old father's heart, and bring him and his wife to disgrace and misery. When I think of the change in everything since two days back—dear Herbert wrung a sort of forgiveness out of me—I can't bear to think of anybody being made miserable."

"And what will your Papa say, child?"

"I think he will feel a good deal for old Proudfoot," said Jenny. "He rather likes the old man, and has laughed at our hatred of Miss Moy's pretensions."

"Then it is settled," said Archie; "I will write to Moy, for I suppose he had rather not see me, that I will say nothing about it publicly while Mr. Proudfoot lives, and will not show this confession of his unless it should be absolutely necessary to my character. Nor after old Proudfoot's death, will I take any step without notice to him."

"Much more than he ought to expect," said Mrs. Poynsett.

"I don't know," said Archie. "If he had refused, it would not have been easy to bring him to the point. I suppose I must have surrendered to take my trial, but after so many years, and with so many deaths, it would have been awkward."

"And the money, mother," said Miles, producing a cheque. "Poor Moy, that was a relief to him. He said he had kept it ready for years."

Mrs. Poynsett waved it off as if she did not like to touch it.

"I don't want it! Take it, Archie. Set up housekeeping on it," she said. "You are not really going back to that place?"

"Yes, indeed I am; I sail on Tuesday. Dear good Aunt Julia, how comfortable it is to feel any-

one caring for me again; but I am afraid even this magnificent present, were it ten times as much, could not keep me; I must go back to fulfil my word to my partner out there, even if I returned at once."

"And you let him go, Jenny?"

"I must!" said Jenny. "And only think how different it is now! For the rest, whether he comes back for me at once, or some years hence, must depend on Papa and Mamma."

She spoke with grave content beaming in her eyes, just like herself. The restoration was still swallowing up everything else.

CHAPTER XV.

HERBERT'S CHRISTMAS.

" And when the self-abhorring thrill
Is past—as pass it must,
When tasks of life thy spirit fill
Then be the self-renouncing will
The seal of thy calm trust.

Lyra Apostolica.

By Christmas Day Archie Douglas was in the Bay of Biscay; but even to Joanna it was not a sorrowful day, for did not Herbert on that day crawl back into his sitting-room, full dressed for the first time, holding tight by her shoulder, and by every piece of furniture on his way to the sofa, Rollo attending in almost pathetic delight, gazing at him from time to time, and thumping the floor with his tail? He had various visitors after his arrival—the first being his Rector, who came on his way back from church to give his congratulations, mention the number of convalescents who had there appeared, and speak of the wedding he had celebrated that morning, that of Fanny Reynolds and her Drake, who were going

forth the next day to try whether they could accomplish a hawker's career free from what the man, at least, had only of late learnt to be sins. It was a great risk, but there had been a penitence about both that Julius trusted was genuine. A print of the Guardian Angel, which had been her boy's treasure, had been hung by Fanny in her odd little bed-room, and she had protested with tears that it would seem like her boy calling her back if she were tempted again.

"Not that I trust much to that," said Julius. "Poor Fanny is soft, and likes to produce an effect; but I believe there is sterling stuff in Drake."

"And he never had a chance before," said Herbert.

"No. Which makes a great difference—all indeed between the Publicans, or the Heathens, and the Pharisees. He can't read, and I doubt whether he said the words rightly after me; but I am sure he meant them."

"I suppose all this has done great good?" said Jenny.

"It will be our fault if it do not do permanent good. It ought," said Julius gravely. "No, no, Herbert, I did not mean to load you with the thought. Getting well is your business for the present—not improving the occasion to others."

To which all that Herbert answered was, "Harry Hornblower!" as if that name spoke volumes of oppression of mind.

That discussion, however, was hindered by Mrs.

Hornblower's own arrival with one of her lodger's numerous meals, and Julius went off to luncheon. The next step on the stairs made Herbert start and exclaim, "That's the dragoon! Come in, Phil."

And there did indeed stand the eldest brother, who had obtained a few days' leave, as he told them, and had ridden over from Strawyers after church. He came in with elaborate caution in his great muddy boots, and looked at Herbert like a sort of natural curiosity, exclaiming that he only wanted a black cap and a pair of bands to be exactly like Bishop Bowater, a Caroline divine, with a meek, oval, spiritual face, and a great display of delicate attenuated fingers, the length of which had always been a doubt and marvel to his sturdy descendants.

"Hands and all," quoth Philip; "and what are you doing with them?" as he spied a Greek Testament in the fingers, and something far too ponderous for them within reach. "Jenny, how dare you?" he remonstrated, poising the bigger book as if to heave it at her head. "That's what comes of your encouraging followers, eh?"

"Ah!" said Jenny, pretending to dodge the missile, while Rollo exercised great forbearance in stifling a bark, "Greek is not quite so severe to some folks as dragoon captains think."

"Severe or not he might let it alone," said Phil, looking much disposed to wrest away the little book, which Herbert thrust under his pillow, saying—

"It was only the Lesson."

"Why can't you read the Lesson like a sensible man in its native English? Don't laugh, children, you know what I mean. There's no good in this fellow working his brain. He can't go up again before September, and according to the Bishop's letter to my father, he is safe to pass, if he could not construe a line, after what he did at Wilsbro'. The Bishop and Co. found they had made considerable donkeys of themselves. Yes, 'tis the ticket for you to be shocked; but it is just like badgering a fellow for his commission by asking him how many facets go to a dragon-fly's eye, instead of how he can stand up to a battery."

"So I thought," said Herbert; "but I know now what it is to be in the teeth of the battery without having done my best to get my weapons about me."

"Come now! Would any of those poor creatures have been the better for your knowing

> 'How many notes a sackbut has,
> Or whether shawms have strings,'

or the Greek particles, which I believe were what sacked you?"

"They would have been the better if I had ever learnt to think what men's souls are, or my own either," said Herbert, with a heavy sigh.

"Ah! well, you have had a sharp campaign," said Phil; "but you'll soon get the better of it when you are at Nice with the old folks. Jolly place—lots

of nice girls—something always going on. I'll try and get leave to take you out; but you'll cut us all out! Ladies won't look at a fellow when there's an interesting young parson to the fore."

Herbert made an action of negation, and his sister said—

"The doctors say Nice will not do after such an illness as this. Papa asked the doctor there, and he said he could not advise it."

"Indeed! Then I'll tell you what, Herbs, you shall come into lodgings at York, and I'll look after you there. You shall ride Pimento, and dine at the mess."

"Thank you, Phil," said Herbert, to whom a few months ago this proposal would have been most seducing, "but I am going home, and that's all the change I shall want."

"Home! Yes, Ellen is getting ready for you. Not your room—oh, no! but the state bed-room! When will you come? My leave is only till Tuesday."

"Oh! I don't know how to think of the drive," sighed Herbert wearily.

"We must wait for a fine day, when he feels strong enough," said Jenny.

"All right," said Phil; "but ten days or a fortnight there will be quite enough, and then you'll come. There are some friends of yours, that only looked at me, I can tell you, for the sake of your name—eh, Master Herbs?"

Herbert did not rise to the bait; but Jenny said, "The Miss Strangeways?"

"Yes. Wouldn't he be flattered to hear of the stunning excitement when they heard of Captain Bowater, and how the old lady, their mother, talked by the yard about him? You'll get a welcome indeed when you come, old fellow. When shall it be?"

"No, thank you, Phil," said Herbert gravely. "I shall come back here as soon as I am well enough. But there is one thing I wish you would do for me."

"Well, what? I'll speak about having any horse you please taken up for you to ride; I came over on Brown Ben, but he would shake you too much."

"No, no, it's about a young fellow. If you could take him back to York to enlist——"

"My dear Herbert, I ain't a recruiting-serjeant."

"No, but it might be the saving of him," said Herbert, raising himself and speaking with more animation. "It is Harry Hornblower."

"Why, that's the chap that bagged your athletic prizes! Whew! Rather strong, ain't it, Joan?"

"He did no such thing," said Herbert, rather petulantly; "never dreamt of it. He only was rather a fool in talking of them—vaunting of me, I believe, as not such a bad fellow for a parson; so his friends got out of him where to find them. But they knew better than to take him with them. Tell him, Jenny; he won't believe me."

"It is quite true, Phil;" said Jenny, "the poor

fellow did get into bad company at the races, but that was all. He did not come home that night, but he was stupefied with drink and the beginning of the fever, and it was proved—perfectly proved—that he was fast asleep at a house at Backsworth when the robbery was committed, and he was as much shocked about it as anyone—more, I am sure, than Herbert, who was so relieved on finding him clear of it that he troubled himself very little about the things. And now he has had the fever—not very badly—and he is quite well now, but he can't get anything to do. Truelove turned him off before the races for hanging about at the Three Pigeons, and nobody will employ him. I do think it is true what they say—his mother, and Julius, and Herbert and all —that he has had a lesson, and wants to turn over a new leaf, but the people here won't let him. Julius and Herbert want him to enlist, and I believe he would, but his mother—as they all do, thinks that the last degradation—but she might listen if Captain Bowater came and told her about his own regiment —cavalry too—and the style of men in it—and it is the only chance for him."

Philip made a wry face.

"You see I took him up and let him down," said Herbert, sadly and earnestly.

"I really do believe," said Jenny, clenching the matter, "that Herbert would get well much faster if Harry Hornblower were off his mind."

Phil growled, and his younger brother and sister knew that they would do their cause no good by another word. There was an odd shyness about them all. The elder brother had not yet said anything about Jenny's prospects, and only asked after the party at the Hall.

"All nearly well, except Frank's deafness," said Jenny. "In a day or two he is going up to London to consult an aurist, and see whether he can keep his clerkship. Miles is going with him, and Rosamond takes Terry up to see his brother in London, and then, I believe, she is going on to get rooms at Rockpier, while Miles comes home to fetch his mother there."

"Mrs. Poynsett!" with infinite wonder.

"Oh yes, all this has really brought out much more power of activity in her. You know it was said that there was more damage to the nervous system than anything else, and the shock has done her good. Besides, Miles is so much less timid about her than dear Raymond, who always handled her like a cracked teapot, and never having known much of any other woman, did not understand what was good for her."

"Miles has more pith in him than ever poor old Raymond had," said Phil. "Poor old Poynsett, I used to think he wanted to be spooney on you, Joan, if he had only known his own mind. If he had, I suppose he would have been alive now!"

"What a pleasing situation for Jenny!" Herbert could not help muttering.

"Much better than running after ostriches in the wilderness," quoth Philip. "You ride them double, don't you?"

"Two little negro boys at a time," replied Jenny, "according to the nursery-book. Will you come and try, Phil?"

"You don't mean to go out?"

"I don't know," said Jenny; "it depends on how Mamma is, and how Edith gets on."

Philip gave a long whistle of dismay. Herbert looked at him wistfully, longing to hear him utter some word of congratulation or sympathy with his sister; but none was forthcoming. Philip had disliked the engagement originally—never had cared for Archie Douglas, and was not melted now that Jenny was more valuable than ever. She knew him too well to expect it of him, and did not want to leave him to vex Herbert by any expression of his opinion on the matter, and on this account, as well as on that of the fatigue she saw on her patient's features, she refused his kind offer of keeping guard while she went in the afternoon to church, adding that Herbert must rest, as Mrs. Duncombe was coming afterwards to take leave of him.

Philip shrugged his shoulders in horror, and declared that he should not return again till *that* was over; but he should look in again before he went home to settle about Herbert's coming to York.

"York!" said Herbert, with a gasp, as Jenny

brought his jelly, and arranged his pillows for a rest while the dragoon's boots resounded on the stairs, "Please tell him to say no more about it. I want them all to understand that I'm not going in for that sort of thing any more."

"My dear, I think you had better not say things hotly and rashly; you may feel so very differently by and by."

"I know that," said Herbert; "but after all it is only what my ordination vows mean, though I did not see it then. And this year must be a penance year; I had made up my mind to that before I fell ill."

"Only you must get well," said Jenny.

"That takes care of itself when one is sound to begin with," said Herbert. "And now that I have been brought back again, and had my eyes opened, and have got another trial given me, it would be double shame to throw it away."

"I don't think you will do that."

"I only pray that all that seems burnt out of me by what I have seen, and heard, and felt, may not come back with my strength."

"I could hardly pray that for you, Herbert," said Jenny. "Spirits are wanted to bear a clergyman through his work, and though you are quite right not to *go in* for those things, I should be sorry if you never enjoyed what came in your way."

"If I never was tempted."

"It need not be temptation. It would not be if

your mind were full of your work—it would only be refreshment. I don't want my boy to turn stern, and dry, and ungenial. That would not be like your rector."

"My rector did not make such a bad start, and can trust himself better," said Herbert. "Come, Jenny, don't look at me in that way. You can't wish me to go to York, and meet those rattling girls again?"

"No, certainly not, though Sister Margaret told Rosamond they had never had such a sobering lesson in their lives as their share in the mischief to you."

"It was not their fault," said Herbert. "It was deeper down than that. And they were good girls after all, if one only had had sense."

"Oh!——"

"Nonsense, Jenny," with a little smile, as he read her face, "I'm not bitten—no—but they, and poor Lady Tyrrell, and all are proof enough that it is easy to turn my head, and that I am one who ought to keep out of that style of thing for the future. So do silence Phil, for you know when he gets a thing into his head how he goes on, and I do not think I can bear it now."

"I am sure you can't," said Jenny, emphatically, "and I'll do my best. Only, Herbie, dear, do one thing for me, don't bind yourself by any regular renunciations of moderate things now your mind is excited, and you are weak. I am sure Julius or Dr. Easterby would say so."

"I'll think," said Herbert. "But if I am forgiven for this year, nothing seems to me too much to give up to the Great Shepherd to show my sorrow. 'Feed My sheep' was the way He bade S. Peter prove his love."

Jenny longed to say it was feeding the sheep rather than self-privation, but she was not sure of her ground, and Herbert's low, quiet, soft voice went to her heart. There were two great tears on his cheeks, he shut his eyes as if to keep back any more, and turned his face inwards on the sofa, his lips still murmuring over "Feed My sheep." She looked at him, feeling as if, while her heart had wakened to new glad hopes of earth, her brother, in her fulfilled prayer, had soared beyond her. They were both quite still till Mrs. Duncombe came to the door.

She was at the Rectory, her house being dismantled, and she, having stayed till the last case of fever was convalescent, and the Sisters recalled, was to go the next day to her mother-in-law's. She was almost as much altered as Herbert himself. Her janty air had given way to something equally energetic, but she looked wiry and worn, and her gold pheasant's crest had become little more than a sandy wisp, as she came quietly in and took the hand that Herbert held out to her, saying how glad she was to see him on the mend.

He asked after some of the people whom they had attended together, and listened to the details, asking

specially after one or two families, where one or both parents had been taken away.

"Poor Cecil Poynsett is undertaking them," was the answer in each case. Some had been already sent to orphanages; others were boarded out till places could be found for them; and the Sisters had taken charge of two.

Then one widow was to "do for" the Vicar, who had taken solitary possession of the Vicarage, but would soon be joined there by one or more curates. He had been inducted into the ruinous chancel of the poor old church, had paid the architect of the Rat-house fifty pounds (a sum just equalling the proceeds of the bazaar) to be rid of his plans; had brought down a first-rate architect; and in the meantime was working the little iron church vigorously.

"Everything seems to be beginning there just as I go into exile!" said Mrs. Duncombe. "It seems odd that I should have to go from what I have only just learnt to prize! But you have taught me a good deal——"

"Everyone must have learnt a good deal," said Herbert, wearily. "If one only has!"

"I meant you, yourself, and that is what I came to thank you for. Yes, I did; even if you don't like to hear it, your sister does, and I must have it out. I shall recollect you again and again standing over all those beds, and shrinking from nothing, and I shall hold up the example to my boys."

"Do hold up something better!"

"Can you write?" she said, abruptly.

"I have written a few lines to my mother."

"Do you remember what you said that night, when you had to hold that poor man in his delirium, and his wife was so wild with fright that she could not help?"

"I am not sure what you mean."

"You said it three or four times. It was only——"

"I remember," said Herbert, as she paused; "it was the only thing I could recollect in the turmoil."

"Would it tire you very much to write it for me in the fly-leaf of this Prayer Book that Mr. Charnock has given me?"

Herbert pulled himself into a sitting posture, and signed to his sister to give him the ink.

"I shall spoil your book," he said, as his hand shook.

"Never mind," she said, eagerly, "the words come back to me whenever I think of the life I have to face, and I want them written; they soothe me, as they soothed that frightened woman and raving man."

And Herbert wrote. It was only—"The Lord is a very present help in trouble."

"Yes," she said; "thank you. Put your initials, pray. There—thank you. No, you can never tell what it was to me to hear those words, so quietly, and gravely, and strongly, in that deadly struggle.

It seemed to me, for the first time in all my life, that God is a real Presence and an actual Help. There! I see Miss Bowater wants me gone; so I am off. I shall hear of you."

Herbert was exhausted with the exertion, and only exchanged a close pressure of the hand, and when Jenny came back, after seeing the lady to the door, she thought there were tears on his cheek, and bent down to kiss him.

"That was just the way, Jenny," his low, tired voice said. "I never could recollect what I wanted to say. Only just those few Psalms that you did manage to teach me before I went to school, they came back and back."

Jenny had no time to answer, for the feet of Philip were on the stairs. He had been visiting Mrs. Hornblower, and persuading her that to make a dragoon of her son was the very best thing for him—great promotion, and quite removed from the ordinary vulgar enlistment in the line—till he had wiled consent out of her. And though Philip declared it was blarney, and was inclined to think it *infra d'g.* to have thus exerted his eloquence, it was certain that Mrs. Hornblower would console herself by mentioning to her neighbours that her son was gone in compliment to Captain Bowater, who had taken a fancy to him.

The relief to Herbert was infinite; but he was by this time too much tired to do anything but murmur

his thanks, and wish himself safe back in his bed, and Philip's strong-armed aid in reaching that haven was not a little appreciated.

Julius looked in with his mother's entreaty that Philip, and if possible his sister, should come up to eat their Christmas dinner at the Hall; and Herbert, wearily declaring that sleep was all he needed, and that Cranky would be more than sufficient for him, insisted on their accepting the invitation; and Jenny was not sorry, for she did not want a *tête-à-tête* with Philip so close to her patient's room, that whatever he chose to hear, he might.

She had quite enough of it in the walk to the Hall. Phil, with the persistency of a person bent on doing a kind thing, returned to his York plan, viewing it as excellent relaxation for a depressed, overworked man, and certain it would be a great treat to "little Herb." He still looked on the tall young man as the small brother to be patronized and protected and dragged out of home petting; so he pooh-poohed all Jenny's gentler hints as to Herbert's need of care and desire to return to his work, until she was obliged to say plainly that he had entreated her to beg it might not be argued with him again, as he was resolved against amusement for the present.

Then Phil grew very angry both with Herbert and Jenny.

"Did they suppose he wanted the boy to do anything unclerical?"

"No; but you know it was by nothing positively unclerical that he was led aside before."

Phil broke out into a tirade against the folly of Jenny's speech. In his view, Herbert's conduct at Wilsbro' had confuted the Bishop's censure, and for his own part, he only wished to amuse the boy, and give him rest, and if he did take him to a ball, or even out with the hounds, he would be on leave, and in another diocese, where the Bishop had nothing to do with him.

Jenny tried to make him understand that dread of the Bishop was the last thing in Herbert's mind. It was rather that he did not think it right to dissipate away a serious impression.

That was worse than before. She was threatened with the most serious displeasure of her father and mother if she encouraged Herbert in the morbid, ascetic notions ascribed to Dr. Easterby.

"It was always the way with the women—they never knew where to stop."

"No," said Jenny, "I did not know there was anywhere to stop in the way of Heaven."

"As if there were no way to Heaven without making a fool of oneself."

This answer made Jenny sorry for her own, as needlessly vexatious, and yet she recollected S. Paul's Christian paradoxes, and felt that poor Herbert might have laid hold of the true theory of the ministry. At any rate she was glad that they

were at that moment hailed and overtaken by the party from the Rectory, and that Phil pounced at once on Julius, to obtain his sanction to giving Herbert a little diversion at York.

Julius answered more warily, "Does he wish it?"

"No; but he is too weak yet, and is hipped and morbid."

"Well, Phil, I would not put it into his head. No doubt you would take very good care of him, but I doubt whether your father would like the Bishop to hear of him—under the circumstances—going to disport himself at the dragoon mess. Besides, I don't think he will be well enough before Lent, and then of course he could not."

This outer argument in a man's voice pacified Phil, as Julius knew it would, much better than the deeper one, and he contented himself with muttering that he should write to his father about it, which every one knew he was most likely not to do.

Who could have foretold last Christmas who would be the party at that dinner? Mrs. Poynsett at the head of her own table, and Miles in the master's place, and the three waifs from absent families would have seemed equally unlikely guests; while of last year's party—Charlie was in India, Tom De Lancey with the aunts in Ireland, Cecil at Dunstone. Mrs. Duncombe was perfectly quiet, not only from the subduing influence of all she had undergone, but, because she felt herself there like an intruder, and

would have refused, but that to leave her at home would have distressed her hostess. Mrs. Poynsett had never seen her before, and after all she had heard about her, was quite amazed at the sight of such an insignificant little person as she was without her dash and sparkle, and in a dress which, when no longer coquettish, verged upon the slovenly.

Poor thing, she was waiting till the Christmas visit of the elder Mrs. Duncombe's own daughter was over so that there might be room for her, and she was thankful for the reprieve, which left her able to spend Christmas among the privileges she had only learnt to value just as she was deprived of them. She looked at Mrs. Poynsett, half in curiosity, half in compunction, as she remembered how she had helped to set Cecil against her.

"But then," as she said to Rosamond, in going home, "I had prejudices about the genus *belle-mère*. And mine always knew and said I should ruin her son, in which, alas! she was quite right!"

"She will be pleased now," said Rosamond.

"No, indeed, I believe she had rather I were rapidity personified than owe the change to anyone of your Rector's sort. I have had a letter or two, warning me against the Sisters, or thinking there is any merit in works of mercy. Ah, well! I'll try to think her a good old woman! But if she had only not strained the cord till it snapped, how much happier Bob and I should have been!"

What a difference there is between straining the cord for oneself and for other people! So Julius could not help feeling when Herbert, in spite of all that could be said to him, about morbid haste in renunciation, sent for the village captain of the cricket-club, and delivered over to him the bat, which had hitherto been as a knightly sword to him resigning his place in the Compton Poynsett Eleven, and replying to the dismayed entreaties and assurances of the young farmer that he would reconsider his decision, and that he would soon be quite strong again, that he had spent too much time over cricket, and liked it too well to trust himself at it again.

That was the last thing before on a New Year's Day, which was like an April day, Herbert came into church once more, and then was carried off in the Strawyers' carriage, lying back half ashamed, half astonished, at the shower of strange tears which the ecstatic shouts and cheers of the village boys had called forth.

CHAPTER XVI.

ROCKPIER.

" For Love himself took part against himself
To warn us off."

Tennyson.

ROSAMOND was to have a taste of her old vocation, and go campaigning for lodgings, the searching for which she declared to be her strongest point. Rockpier was to be the destination of the family; Eleonora Vivian, whose letters had been far fewer than had been expected of her, was known to be there with her father, and this was lure sufficient for Frank. Frank's welfare again was the lure to Mrs. Poynsett; and the benefit Rosamond was to derive from sea air, after all she had gone through, made Julius willing to give himself the holiday that everybody insisted on his having until Lent.

First, however, was sent off an advanced guard, consisting of Rosamond and Terry, who went up to London with Frank, that he might there consult an aurist, and likewise present himself to his chief, and

see whether he could keep his clerkship. All this turned out well, his duties did not depend on his ears, and a month's longer leave of absence was granted to him; moreover, his deafness was pronounced to be likely to yield to treatment, and a tube restored him to somewhat easier intercourse with mankind, and he was in high spirits when, after an evening spent with Rosamond's friends, the M'Kinnons, the trio took an early train for Rockpier, where Rosamond could not detain Frank even to come to the hotel with them and have luncheon before hurrying off to Verdure Point, the villa inhabited by Sir Harry. All he had done all the way down was to impress upon her in the fulness of his knowledge of the place, that the only habitable houses in Rockpier were in that direction—the nearer to Verdure Point the more perfect!

Terry listened with smiling eyes, sometimes viewing the lover as a bore, sometimes as a curious study, confirming practical statements. Terry was thoroughly well, only with an insatiable appetite, and he viewed his fellow convalescent's love with double wonder when he found it caused oblivion of hunger, especially as Frank still looked gaunt and sallow, and was avowedly not returned to his usual health.

Rosamond set forth house-hunting, dropping Terry ere long at the Library, where she went to make inquiries, and find the *sine quâ non*. When she reached the sitting-room at the hotel, she found

Frank cowering over the fire in an arm-chair, the picture of despondency. Of course he did not hear her entrance, and she darted up to him, and put her hand on his shoulder. He looked up to her with an attempt at indifference.

"Well, Frank!"

"Well, Rose! How have you sped?"

"I have got a house; but it is in Marine Terrace. I don't know what you'll say to me."

"I don't know that it signifies."

"You are shivering! What's the matter?"

"Only, it is very cold!"

(*Aside.* "Ring the bell, Terry, he is as cold as ice.") "Did you see her?"

"Oh yes. Did you have any luncheon?" ("Some port-wine and hot water directly, please.")

. "Yes, I believe so. You are not ordering anything for me? There's nothing amiss—only it is so cold."

"It is cold, and you are not to be cold; nor are we to be cold, sir. You must go to bed early in the evening, Terry," said Rosamond, at last. "I shall make nothing of him while you are by, and an hour's more sleep will not be lost on you."

"Will you come and tell me then, Rosey? I deserve something."

"What, for sleeping there instead of here, when you've nothing to do?"

"Indeed, but I have. I want to make out this

little Chaucer. I shall go down to the coffee-room and do it."

"Well, if you like poking out your eyes with the gas in the coffee-room, I have no objection, since you are too proud to go to bed. Wish him good-night first, and do it naturally."

"Nature would be thrown away on him, poor fellow," said Terry, as he roused Frank with difficulty to have "Good-night" roared into his ear, and give a listless hand. He was about to deal with Rosamond in the same way, but she said—

"No, I am not going yet," and settled herself opposite to him, with her half-knitted baby's shoe in her hands, and her feet on the fender, her crape drawn up from the fire, disposed for conversation. Frank, on the other hand, fell back into the old position, looking so wretched that she could bear it no longer, picked up the tube, forced it on him, and said, "Do tell me, dear Frank. You used to tell me long ago."

He shook his head. "That's all over. You are very good, Rosamond, but you should not have forced her to come to me."

"Not!"

"My life was not worth saving."

"She has not gone back from you again?—the horrible girl!" (*this last aside*).

"It is not that she has gone back. She has never changed. It is I who have forfeited her."

"You!—You!—She has not cast you off?"

"You know how it was, and the resolution by which she had bound herself, and how I was maddened."

"That! I thought it was all forgiven and forgotten!" cried Rosamond.

"It is not a matter of forgiveness. She put it to me whether it was possible to begin on a broken word."

"Worse and worse! Why, when you've spoken a foolish word, it is the foolishest thing in the world to hold to it."

"If it were a foolish word!" said poor Frank. "I think I could have atoned for that day, if she could have tried me; but when she left me to judge, and those eyes of sweet, sorrowful——"

"Sweet! Sorrowful, indeed! About as sweet and sorrowful as the butcher to the lamb. Left you to judge! A refinement of cruelty! She had better have stayed away when I told her it was the only chance to save your life."

"Would that she had!" sighed Frank. "But that was your doing, Rosamond, and what she did in mere humanity can't be cast back again to bind her against her conscience."

"Plague on her conscience!" was my Lady's imprecation. "I wonder if it is all coquetry!"

"She deserves no blame," said Frank, understanding the manner, though the words were under Rosamond's breath. "Her very troubles in her own

family have been the cause of her erecting a standard of what alone she could trust. Once in better days she fancied I came up to it, and when I know how far I have fallen short of it——"

"Nonsense. She had no business to make the condition without warning you."

"She knows more of me than only that," muttered poor Frank. "I was an ass in town last summer. It was the hope of seeing her that drew me; but if I had kept out of that set, all this would never have been."

"It was all for her sake." (A substratum of "Ungrateful, ungenerous girl.")

"For her sake, I thought—not her true sake." Then there was a silence, broken by his exclaiming, "Rose, I must get away from here!"

"You can't," she called back. "Here's your mother coming. She would be perfectly miserable to find you gone."

"It is impossible I should stay here."

"Don't be so chicken-hearted, Frank. If she has a heart worth speaking of, she'll come round, if you only press hard enough. If not, you are well quit of her."

He cried out at this, and Rosamond saw that what she called faintness of heart was really reverence and sense of his own failings; but none the less did she scorn such misplaced adoration, as it seemed to her, and scold him in her own fashion, for not rushing on to conquer irresistibly; or else being cool and easy

as to his rejection. He would accept neither alternative, was depressed beyond the power of comfort, bodily weariness adding to his other ills, and went off at last to bed, without retracting his intention of going away.

"Well, Terry, it is a new phase, and a most perplexing one!" said Rosamond, when her brother came back with arch curiosity in his brown eyes. "The girl has gone and turned him over, and there he lies on his back prostrate, just like Ponto, when he knows he deserves it!"

"Turned him over—you don't mean that she is off? I thought she was a perfect angel of loveliness and goodness."

"Goodness! It is enough to make one hate goodness, unless this is all mere pretence on her part. But what I am afraid of is his setting off, no one knows where, before anyone is up, and leaving us to confront his mother, while he falls ill in some dog-hole of a place. He is not fit to go about by himself, and I trust to you to watch him, Terry."

"Shall I lie on the mat outside his door?" said Terry, half meaning it, and somewhat elated by the romantic situation.

"No, we are not come to quite such extremities. You need not even turn his key by mistake; only keep your ears open. He is next to you, is he not?—and go in on pretext of inquiry—if you hear him up to mischief."

Nothing was heard but the ordinary summons of Boots; and it turned out in the morning that the chill had exasperated his throat, and reduced him to a condition which took away all inclination to move, besides deafening him completely.

Rosamond had to rush about all day, providing plenishing for the lodging. Once she saw Sir Harry and his daughter in the distance, and dashed into a shop to avoid them, muttering, "I don't believe she cared for him one bit. I dare say she has taken up with Lorimer Strangeways after all! Rather worse than her sister, I declare, for she never pretended to be too *good* for Raymond," and then as a curate in a cassock passed—"Ah! some of them have been working on her, and persuading her that he is not good enough for her. Impertinent prig! He looks just capable of it!"

Frank was no better as to cold and deafness, though somewhat less uncomfortable the next day in the lodging, and Rosamond went up without him to the station to meet the rest of the party, and arrange for Mrs. Poynsett's conveyance. They had accomplished the journey much better than had been hoped, but it was late and dark enough to make it expedient that Mrs. Poynsett should be carried to bed at once, after her most unwonted fatigue, and only have one glimpse and embrace of Frank, so as to stave off the knowledge of his troubles till after her night's rest. He seconded this desire, and indeed

Miles and Anne only saw that he had a bad cold; but Rosamond no sooner had her husband to herself, than she raved over his wrongs to her heart's content, and implored Julius to redress them, though how she did not well know, since she by turns declared that Frank was well quit of Lenore, and that he would never get over the loss.

Julius demurred a good deal to her wish of sending him on a mission to Eleonora. All Charnocks naturally swung back to distrust of the Vivians, and he did not like to plead with a girl who seemed only to be making an excuse to reject his brother; while, on the other hand, he knew that Raymond had not been satisfied with Frank's London habits, nor had he himself been at ease as to his religious practices, which certainly had been the minimum required to suit his mother's notions. He had been a communicant on Christmas Day, but he was so entirely out of reach that there was no knowing what difference his illness might have made in him; Eleonora might know more than his own family did, and have good and conscientious reasons for breaking with him; and, aware that his own authority had weight with her, Julius felt it almost too much responsibility to interfere till the next day, when his mother, with tears in her eyes, entreated him to go to Miss Vivian, to find out what was this dreadful misunderstanding, which perhaps might only be from his want of hearing, and implore her, in the name of an old woman, not to break her boy's

heart, and darken his life, as it had been with his brother.

Mrs. Poynsett was tremulous and agitated, and grief had evidently told on her high spirit, so that Julius could make no objection, but promised to do his best.

By the time it was possible to Julius to call, Sir Harry and Miss Vivian were out riding, and he had no further chance till at the gaslit Friday evening lecture, to which he had hurried after dinner, a lady became faint in the heated atmosphere, two rows of chairs before him, and as she turned to make her way out, he saw that it was Eleonora, and was appalled by seeing not only the whiteness of the present faintness, but that thinness and general alteration which had changed the beautiful face so much that he asked himself for a moment whether she could have escaped the fever.

In that moment he had moved forward to her support; and she, seeming to have no one belonging to her, clung to the friendly arm, and was presently in the porch, where the cool night air revived her at once, and she begged him to return, saying nothing ailed her but gas.

"No, I shall see you home, Lena."

"Indeed, there is no need," said the trembling voice, in which he detected a sob very near at hand.

"I shall use my own judgment as to that," said Julius, kindly.

She made no more resistance, but rose from the seat in the porch, and accepted his arm. He soon felt that her steps were growing firmer, and he ventured to say, "I had been looking for you to-day."

"Yes, I saw your card."

"I had a message to you from my mother." Lenore trembled again, but did not dare to relax her hold on him. "I think you can guess what it is. She thinks poor Frank must have mistaken what you said."

"No—I wrote it," said Lena very low.

"And you really meant that the resolution made last year is to stand between you and Frank? I am not blaming you, I do not know whether you may not be acting rightly and wisely, and whether you may not have more reason than I know of to shrink from intrusting yourself to Frank; but my mother cannot understand it, and when she sees him heartbroken, and too unwell to act for himself——"

"Oh! is he ill?"

"He has a very bad cold, and could not get up till the afternoon, and he is deafer than ever."

Lena moaned.

He proceeded: "So as he cannot act for himself, my mother begged me to come to an understanding."

"I told him to judge," said Lena, faintly, but turning Julius so as to walk back along the parade instead of to her abode.

"Was not that making him his own executioner?" said Julius.

"A promise is binding," she added.

"Yet, is it quite fair?" said Julius, sure now which way her heart went, and thinking she was really longing to be absolved from a superstitious feeling, "is it fair to expect another person to be bound by a vow of which you have not told him?"

"I never thought he could," sighed she.

"And you know he was entrapped!" said Julius, roused to defend his brother.

"And by whom?" she said in accents of deep pain.

"I should have thought it just—both by your poor sister and by him—to undo the wrong then wrought," said Julius, "unless, indeed, you have some further cause for distrusting him?"

"No! no!" cried she. "Oh, Julius! I do it for his own good. Your mother knows not what she wishes, in trying to entangle him again with me."

"Lenore, will you tell me if anything in him, besides that unhappy slip, makes you distrust him?"

"I must tell the whole truth," gasped the poor girl, as they walked along in the sound of the sea, the dark path here and there brightened by the gas-lights, "or you will think it is his fault! Julius, I know more about my poor father than ever I did before. I was a child when I lived here before, and then Camilla took all the management. When we came to London, two months ago, I soon saw the kind of people he got round him for his comforters. I knew how he spent

his evenings. It is second nature to him—he can't get out of it, I believe! I persuaded him to come down here, thinking it a haven of peace and safety. Alas! I little knew what old habits there were to resume, nor what was the real reason Camilla brought us away after paying our debts. I was a happy child *then*, when I only knew that papa was gone to his club. Now I know that it is a billiard-room—and that it is doing all the more harm because he is there—and I see him with people whom he does not like me to speak to. I don't know whether I could get him away, and it would be as bad anywhere else. I don't think he can help it. And he is often unwell; he can't do without me when he has the gout, and I ought not to leave him to himself. And then, if—if we did marry and he lived with us in London, think what it would be for Frank to have such a set brought about him. I don't see how he could keep them off. Or even an engagement bringing him down here—or anywhere, among papa's friends would be very bad for him. I saw it in London, even with Camilla to keep things in check." She was almost choked with suppressed agony.

"I see," said Julius, gravely and pitifully, "it would take a man of more age and weight than poor Frank to deal with the habits of a lifetime. The risk is great."

"And when I saw it," added Eleonora, "I felt I must never, never bring him into it. And how could

I tell him? Your mother does not know, or she could not wish it!"

"It is plain that in the present state of things you ought not to marry, and so far you are judging nobly," said Julius; "but next comes the question—how far it is well to make that day at the races the pretext?"

"Don't call it a pretext," said Lenore, quickly. "I meant what I said a year ago, with all my soul. Perhaps it was hasty, when poor Camilla drove me into saying I did not mean only an habitual gambler, but one who had ever betted. And now, well as I know how cruelly she used that presumptuous vow of mine, and how she repented of it at last, still I feel that to fly in its face might be so wrong, that I should have no right to expect not to drag Frank down."

"Perhaps I am too much interested to judge fairly," said Julius. "I should like you to consult some one—say Dr. Easterby—but it seems to me that it is just such a vow as you may well be absolved from."

"But is it not Frank's protection?"

"Put yourself in that poor fellow's place, Lena, and see what it is to him to be cast off for such a reason. He did the wrong, I know. He knew he ought not, apart from your resolution, and he did thus prove his weakness and unfitness——"

"Oh no, no—it was not his fault."

Julius laughed a little, and added, "I am not saying he deserves you—hush!—or that it would be well to take him now, only that I think to find himself utterly rejected for so insufficient a reason, and when he was really deceived, would not only half kill him now, but do his whole nature cruel harm."

"What is to be done then?" sighed Eleonora.

"I should say, and I think my mother would put him on some probation if you like, even before you call it an engagement; but give him hope. Let him know that your attachment is as true and unselfish as ever, and do not let him brood in misery, enhanced by his deafness."

"I can't marry while poor papa is like what he is," said she, as if trying to keep hold of her purpose.

"But you can be Frank's light and hope—the prize for which he can work."

"If—your mother will have it so—then," said Eleonora, and the sigh that followed was one to relieve, not exhaust.

"May I tell her then?"

"You must, I suppose," said the poor girl; "but she can never wish it to go on!"

Julius left her at her own door and went home.

As Mrs. Poynsett said, she could expect nothing better of him. "It is quite clear," she said, "that poor Lena is right, that Frank must not set up housekeeping with him. Even if he were certain to be

proof against temptation, it would be as bad a connection as could be. I never thought of his being with them; but I suppose there is nothing else to be done with him."

"Frank ought not to be exposed to the trial. The old man has a certain influence over him."

"Though I should have thought such a hoary old wreck was nothing but a warning. It has been a most unhappy affair from first to last; but Lena is a good, unselfish girl, and nothing else will give Frank a chance of happiness. Waiting will do them no harm, they are young enough, and have no great sum to marry upon, so if you can bring her to me to-morrow, Julius, I will ask her to grant my poor boy leave to wait till she can see her way to marrying."

Julius ventured to write down, "Hope on!"

To this Frank replied with rather a fiery look, "Mind, I will not have her persuaded or worked on. It must be all her own doing. Yes," answering a look of his brother, "I see what you are about. You want to tell her it is a superstition about her vow and not using me fairly. So it may be in some points of view; but the fact remains. She thought she might trust to my good sense and principle, and it proved that she was wrong. After that it is not right to force myself on her. I don't dare to do it, Julius. I have not been shut up with myself all these weeks for nothing. I know now how unworthy I ever was to think of her as mine. If I can ever prove my repentance she

might in time forgive me; but for her to be driven to take me out of either supposed justice or mercy, I will not stand! A wretched deaf being like me! It is not fitting, and I *will* not have it done!"

Julius wrote—"She is suffering greatly. She nearly fainted at church, and I had to take her out."

Frank's face worked, and he put his hand over it as he said, "You are all torturing her; I shall write a letter and settle it myself."

Frank did write the letter that very night, and when Julius next saw Eleonora her eyes were swollen with weeping, and she said—

"Take me to him! I must comfort him!"

"You have heard from him?"

"Yes. Such a beautiful letter. But he must not think it *that*."

She did show the letter, reserved though she was. She was right about it; Julius was struck with the humble sweetness, which made him think more highly of poor Frank than ever he had done before. He had decided against himself, feeling how much his fall at the race-ground had been the effect of the manner in which he had allowed himself to be led during the previous season in London, and owning how far his whole aim in life fell short of what it ought to be, asking nothing for himself, not even hope nor patience, though he could not refrain from expressing his own undying love, and his one desire that if she had not attached herself to one more worthy, he might

in time be thought to have proved his repentance. In the meantime she would and could be only his beacon star.

Julius could not but take her home, and leave her with Frank, though his mother was a little annoyed not to have first seen her; but when Frank himself brought her to Mrs. Poynsett's arms, it turned out that the two ladies were quite of one mind as to the inexpediency of Sir Harry living with Frank. They said it very covertly, but each understood the other, and Eleonora went home wonderfully happier, and looking as if her fresh beauty would soon return.

There was quite enough to dazzle Miles, whose first opinion was that they were hard on Sir Harry, and that two ladies and a clergyman might be making a great deal too much of an old man's form of loitering, especially in a female paradise of ritualism, as he was pleased to call Rockpier, where all the male population seemed to be invalids.

However, it was not long before he came round to their view. He found that Sir Harry, in spite of his gentlemanly speech and bearing, was a battered old *roué*, who was never happy but when gambling, and whose air and title were baits to victims of a lower class than himself; young clerks and medical students who were flattered by his condescension. He did not actually fleece them himself, he had too little worldly wisdom for that; but he was the decoy of a coterie of Nyms, Pistols, and Bardolphs, who

gathered up the spoil of these and any unwary youth who came to Rockpier in the wake of an invalid, or to "see life" at a fashionable watering-place. Miles thought the old man was probably reduced to a worse style of company, by the very fact of the religious atmosphere of the place, where he himself found so little to do that he longed for the opening of the Session; but he was strongly impressed with the impracticability of a *ménage* for Frank, with the baronet as father-in-law.

Not so, Sir Harry. He was rather fond of Frank, and had been glad to be no longer bound to oppose the match, and he had benignantly made up his mind to the great sacrifice of living in his house in London, surrounding himself with all his friends, and making the young couple supply him with pocket-money whenever he had a run of ill-luck. They would grant it more easily than Camilla, and would never presume to keep him under regulation as she had done. They would be too grateful to him.

So, after a day or two, he demanded of Eleonora whether her young man had given her up, or what he meant by his coolness in not calling? Lena answered the last count by explaining how unwell he had been, and how his hearing might be lost by a renewal of his cold. She was however further pressed, and obliged to say how matters stood, namely, that they were engaged, but meant to wait.

Whereupon, Sir Harry, quite sincerely, poor old

man, grew compassionate and grandly benignant. The young people were prudent, but he would come to their aid. His pittance added to theirs—even now would set all things straight. He would never stand in the way of their happiness!

Mrs. Poynsett had bidden Lena cast the whole on her shoulders. The girl was too truthful and generous to do this, fond as she still was of her father.

"No, dear papa," she said, "it is very kind in you," for she knew that so he meant it, "but I am afraid it will not quite do. You see Frank must be very careful in his situation—and I don't think so quiet a way of life would suit you."

"Nonsense child; I'm an old man, and I want no racketing. Just house-room for myself and Victor. That fellow is worth two women in a house. You'll keep a good cook. I'll never ask for more than a few old friends to dinner, when I don't feel disposed to have them at the club."

Old friends! Yes, Lenore knew them, and her flesh crept to think of Frank's chief hearing of them constantly at his house.

"I don't think we should afford it, dear papa," she said. "We have agreed that I had better stay with you for the present, and let Frank make his way."

Then a thought occurred to Sir Harry. "Is this the Poynsetts' doing?"

"No," said Eleonora, stoutly, "It is mine. I know that—oh! papa, forgive me!—the things and people you like would not be good for Frank, and I will not leave you nor bring him into them. Never!"

Sir Harry swore—almost for the first time before her—that this was that old hag, Mrs. Poynsett's doing, and that she would make his child abandon him in his old age. He would not have his daughter dragged into a long engagement. Wait—he knew what waiting meant—wait for his death; but they should have her now or not at all; and he flung away from her and her intreaties to announce his determination to the suitor's family.

He did not find this very easy to accomplish. Frank's ears were quite impervious to all his storming, and if he was to reduce his words to paper, they came less easily. Miles, to whom he tried to speak as a man of the world, would only repeat that his mother would never consent to the marriage, unless the young couple were to live alone; nay, he said, with a grain of justice, he thought that had been Sir Harry's own view in a former case. Would he like to see Mrs. Poynsett? she is quite ready.

Again Sir Harry quailed at the notion of encountering Mrs. Poynsett; but Miles, who had a great idea that his mother could deal with everybody, and was the better for doing so, would not let him off, and ushered him in, then stood behind her chair, and thoroughly enjoyed the grand and yet courteous way in which she

reduced to nothing Sir Harry's grand beneficence in eking out the young folk's income with his own. She knew very well that even when the estate was sold, at the highest estimate, Eleonora would have the barest maintenance, and that he could hardly expect what the creditors now allowed him, and she made him understand that she knew this, and that she had a right to make conditions, since Frank, like her other sons, could not enter into possession of his share of his father's fortune unless he married with her consent.

And when he spoke of breaking off the engagement, she was callous, and said that he must do as he pleased, though after young people were grown up, she thought the matter ought to rest with themselves. She did not wish her son to marry till his character was more confirmed.

He went home very angry, and yet crest-fallen, sought out Eleonora, and informed her of his command, that her engagement should be broken off.

"I do not know how that can be done, papa," said Eleonora. "We have never exactly made an engagement; we do not want to marry at once, and we could not help loving each other, if we tried."

"Humph! And if I laid my commands on you never to marry into that family?"

"I do not think you will do that, papa, after your promise to Camilla."

She had conquered. No further objection was made to her being as much pleased with the Charnocks

as long as they remained at Rockpier, nor to her correspondence with Frank when he went away, not to solitary lodgings as before, but to the London house, which Miles and Anne only consented to keep on upon condition of their mother sharing it with them.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE THIRD AUTUMN.

" A good man ther was of religion,
That was a poure Persone of a toune ;
But rich he was of holy thought and work,
He also was a learned man, a clerk."

Chaucer.

AUTUMN came round again, and brought with it a very different September from the last.

Willansborough was in a state of commotion. That new Vicar had not only filled the place with curates, multiplied services in the iron church, and carried on the building of St. Nicolas in a style of beauty that was quite affronting to those who were never asked to contribute to it, but he gave people no peace in their easy conventional sins, pricked them in their hearts with personal individual stings, and, worse than all, protested against the races, as conducted at Wilsbro'.

And their Member was just as bad! Captain Charnock Poynsett, instead of subscribing, as part of his duty to his constituents, had replied by sending his brother Raymond's half-finished letter to the club,

with an equally strong and resolute one of his own, and had published both in all the local papers.

Great was the fury and indignation of Wilsbro', Backsworth, and all the squires around. Of course it was a delirious fancy of poor Raymond Poynsett, and Miles had been worked upon by his puritanical wife and ritualistic brother to publish it. Newspapers teemed with abuse of superstition and pharisaism, and praise of this wholesome, moral, and "truly English" sport. Gentlemen, and ladies too, took the remonstrance as a personal offence, and threatened to visit no more at Compton; the electors bade him look to his seat, and held meetings to invite "Mr. Simmonds Proudfoot," as he now called himself, to represent them; and the last week, before the races, the roughs mobbed him in Water Lane. He rode quietly through them, with his sailor face set as if against a storm, but when he was out of the place, he stopped his horse at Herbert Bowater's lodgings, that his black eye might be washed, and the streams of rotten egg removed from his coat before he presented himself at home. Not that he had much fear of startling his wife and mother. It was more from the Englishman's hatred of showing himself a hero, for Anne was perfectly happy in the persecution he had brought on himself, for she never had been so sure before that he was not of the world, worldly.

The races were exceptionally brilliant, and fully attended, but the triumph of the roughs had made

them more outrageously disgraceful in their conduct than ever; and when Miles went to the quarter-sessions, rather doubting whether he should not find himself landed in Coventry, not only did the calendar of offences speak for itself, but sundry country gentlemen shook him by the hand, lamenting that railways and rowdyism had entirely altered races from what they used to be, that he was in the right, and what they had seen so recently proved that the only thing to be done was to withdraw from what respectable people could no longer keep within bounds. Such withdrawal will not prevent them, but it will hinder the demoralization from being so extensive as formerly, since no one of much character to lose will attend them.

Mr. Bowater rejoiced in Miles's triumph. None of that family had been at these same races. They had all been much too anxious about Herbert not to view Ember Week in a very different light from that in which they had thought of it before.

Lent had brought the junior curate back from Strawyers, not much more than a convalescent, but with his sister to look after him, and both Rector and senior anxious to spare him; he had gone on well till the family returned and resumed Jenny, when he was left to his own devices, namely, "all work and no play." He was as fixed as ever in his resolution of making this a penance year, and believed himself so entirely recovered as to be able to do without relaxations. Cricket, riding, dinners, and garden-parties

alike he had given up, and divided his time entirely between church and parish work and study. Hard reading had never been congenial, and took a great deal out of him, and in fact, all his theological study had hitherto been little more than task-work, into which he had never fully entered, whereas these subjects had now assumed such a force, depth, and importance, that he did in truth feel constrained to go to the very foundation, and work through everything again moved and affected by them in every fibre of his soul, which vibrated now at what it had merely acquiesced in before. It was a phase that had come suddenly on him, when his mind was in full vigour of development, and his frame and nerves below par, and the effect could not but be severe. He was wrapped up in these great realities, and seemed to care for no talk, except discussing them with Julius or the senior curate, and often treated things of common life like the dream that they really are.

Julius laid as little parish work on him as possible only, indeed, what seemed actually beneficial by taking him out; but it may be feared, that in his present fervid state, he was not nearly so winning to his young clients as when he was less "terribly in earnest," although the old women were perhaps more devoted to him, from the tender conviction "that the poor dear young gentleman would not be here long."

For indeed it was true that he had never advanced in strength or looks since his return, but rather lost

ground, and thus every change of weather, or extra exertion told on him, till in August he was caught in a thunder-storm, and the cold that ensued ran on into a feverish attack, which barely left him in time for the Ordination, and then with a depressed system, and nerves morbidly sensitive.

So sensible (or more than sensible) was he of his deficiencies, that he would willingly have held back, and he was hardly well enough to do himself justice; but there was no doubt that he would pass, and it was plain that three more months of the strain of preparation might leave permanent effects on his health.

As it was the examining chaplain did not recognise the lean, pale, anxious man, for the round-faced, rosy, overgrown boy of a year ago. His scholarship and critical knowledge were fairly above the mark, in spite of a racking headache; and his written sermon, together with all that was elicited from him, revealed, all unconsciously to himself, what treasures he had brought back from the deep waters which had so nearly closed over him.

So superior had he shown himself, that he was appointed to read the Gospel, a choice that almost shocked him, knowing that what had made him excel had been an experience that the younger men had happily missed. But the mark of approval was compensation to his parents and sisters for the disappointment of the last year, and the only drawback was fear of the effect of the long ceremonial, so deeply felt.

He met them afterwards, very white-faced, with head aching, and weary almost beyond speech, but with a wonderfully calm, restful look on his face, such as reminded Jenny of those first hours of his recovery.

They took him home and put him to bed, and there he lay, hardly speaking, and generally sleeping. There he still was on the Monday, when Julius came to inquire after him, and was taken up stairs at once by Jenny, with the greeting, "So the son and heir is come, Julius?"

"Yes, and I never saw my mother more exulting. When Rosamond ran down to tell her, she put her arms round her neck and cried. She who never had a tear through all last year. I met your father and mother half-way, and they told me I might come on."

"I think nothing short of such news would have made mamma leave this boy," said Jenny; "but she must have her jubilee with Mrs. Poynsett."

"And I'm quite well," said Herbert, who had been grasping Julius's hand, with a wonderful look in his eyes; "yes, really—the doctor said so."

"Yes, he did," said Jenny, "only he said we were to let him alone, and that he was not to get up till he felt quite rested."

"And I shall get up to dinner," said Herbert, so sleepily, that Julius doubted it. "I hope to come back before Sunday."

"What does your doctor say to that?"

"He says," replied Jenny, "that this gentleman

must be rational; that he has nothing the matter with him now, but that he is low, and ripe for anything. Don't laugh, you naughty boy, he said you were ripe for anything, and that he must—yes, he *must*—be turned out to grass somehow or other for the winter, and do nothing at all."

"I begin to see what you are driving at, Mrs. Joan, you look so triumphant."

"*Yes*," said Jenny, blushing a little, and looking quite young again; "I believe poor mamma would be greatly reconciled to it, if Herbert were to see me out to Natal."

"Is that to be the way?"

"It would be very absurd to make Archie come home again for me," said Jenny. "And everything else is most happily smoothed for me, you know; Edith has come quite to take my place at home; mamma learnt to depend on her much more than on me while I was with Herbert."

"And it has made her much more of a woman," added Herbert.

"Then you know that full statement poor Mr. Moy put forth when he left the place, on his wife's death quite removed all lingering hesitation on papa's part," added Jenny.

"It ought, I am sure!" said Julius.

"So, now, if Herbert will go out with me, it seems to me to be all right," said Jenny, colouring deeply, as she made this lame and impotent conclusion.

"My father wishes it," said Herbert. "I believe he meant to see you to-day to ask leave of absence for me. That is what he wishes; but I have made up my mind that I ought to resign the curacy—where I have never been any use to you—though, if I had been well, I meant to have worked a year with you, as a priest."

"I don't like to lose you, but I think you are right. Your beginning with me was a mistake. There is not enough work for three of us; but you know Easterby would be delighted to have you at St. Nicolas. He says his most promising people talk of what you said to them when they were ill, and he asked me if you could possibly come to him?"

"I think it would be better to begin in a new place, further from home," said Herbert, quietly.

And both knew what he meant, and how hard it would be to be the clergyman he had learnt to wish to be, if his mother were at hand to be distressed by all he did or did not do.

"But, any way," added Herbert, "I hope to have some time longer at Compton before I go. Next Sunday, if I only *can*."

His mind was evidently full of the Feast of the Sunday, and Julius answered, "Whichever Sunday you are strong enough, of course, dear fellow. You had better come with him, Jenny, and sleep at the Rectory."

"Oh! thank you. I should like nothing so much; and I think they will spare me that one day."

"You will come in for a grand gathering, that is if poor Cecil accepts. Miles thinks she ought to be Godmother."

"Oh!"

"And no one has said a word of any cloud. It is better he should know nothing."

"And oh! Julius, is it true that her father has bought Sirenwood for her?"

"Quite true. You know it was proposed at first, but the trustees doubted of the title; but when all that was cleared up, it turned out to be a better investment than Swanslea, and so they settled it, without much reference to her."

"She will let it of course?"

"I suppose so."

"You don't think she will come to the christening?"

"I cannot tell; Rose has had one or two very sad letters from her. She wanted us very much to come to Dunstone, and was much disappointed that we were prevented. I fancy her heart has turned to us, and that it is very sore, poor thing."

Julius was right. Cecil did return an answer, whose warmth quite amazed all but Miles and Anne, who thought nothing too much for their son; and she gladly came to attend the christening of the young Raymond. Gladly—yes, she was glad to leave Dunstone. She had gone home weary and sick of

her lodging and convalescence, and hoping to find relief in the home that had once been all-sufficient for her, but Dunstone was not changed, and she was. She had not been able to help out-growing its narrow opinions and formal precisions; and when she came home, crushed with her scarcely realized grief, nothing there had power to comfort her.

There was soothing at first in her step-mother's kindness, and she really loved her father; but their petting admiration soon grew oppressive, after the more bracing air of Compton; and their idolatry of her little brother fretted and tried her all the more, because they thought he must be a comfort to her, and any slight from her might be misconstrued. Mr. Venn's obsequiousness, instead of rightful homage, seemed deprivation of support, and she saw no one, spoke to no one, without the sense of Raymond's vast superiority and her own insensibility to it, loving him a thousand times more than she had loved him in life, and mourning him with an anguish beyond what the most perfect union would have left. She had nothing to do. Self-improvement was a mere oppression, and she longed after nothing so much as the sight of Rosamond, Anne, Julius, or even Frank, and her amiable wishes prevailed to have them invited to Dunstone; but at the times specified there were hindrances. Anne had engagements at home, and Rosamond appeared to the rest of the family to be a perpetual refuge for stray De Lanceys, while

Frank had to make up for his long enforced absence by a long unbroken spell of work.

Cecil, therefore, had seen none of the family till she arrived at Compton. She was perfectly well, she said, and had become a great walker, and so, indeed, she showed herself, for she went out directly after breakfast every morning, and never appeared again till luncheon time; and would take long rides in the afternoon. "It was her only chance of sleep," she said, when remonstrated with. She did not look ill, but there was a restless, worn air that was very distressing on her young features, and was the more piteous to her relations, that she was just as constrained as ever in her intercourse with them. She was eagerly attentive to Mrs. Poynsett, and evidently so anxious to wait on her that Anne left to her many little services, but if they were alone together, they were tongue-tied, and never went deeper than surface subjects. Mrs. Poynsett never discussed her, never criticised her, never attempted to fathom her, being probably convinced that there was nothing but hard coldness to be met with by probing. Yet there was something striking in Cecil's having made people call her Mrs. Raymond Poynsett, surrendering the Charnock, which she had once brandished in all their faces, and going by the name by which her husband had been best known.

To Anne she was passively friendly, and neither gave nor sought confidences, and Anne was so much

occupied with her baby, and all the little household services that had grown on her, as well as with her busy husband, that there was little leisure for them; and though the meeting with Rosamond was at first the most effusive and affectionate of all, afterwards she seemed to avoid *tête-à-têtes* with her, and was shyer with her than with Anne.

It was Miles that she got on with best. He had never so fully realized the unhappiness of his brother's married life as those who had watched it; and he simply viewed her as Raymond's loved and loving widow and sincere mourner, and treated her with all brotherly tenderness and reverence for her grief; while she responded with a cordiality and gratitude which made her, when talking to him, a pleasanter person than she had ever been seen at Compton before.

But it was not to Miles, but to Rosamond, that she brought an earnest question, walking in one autumn morning to the Rectory, amid the falling leaves of the Virginian-creeper, and amazing Rosamond, who was writing against time for the Indian mail, by asking—

"Rosamond, will you find out if Mrs. Poynsett would mind my coming to live at Sirenwood?"

"You, Cecil!"

"Yes, I'm old enough. There's no place for me at home, and though I must be miserable anywhere, it will be better where I have something to do, of some real use to somebody. I've been walking all

round every day, and seeing what a state it is in—in the hands of creditors all these years."

"But you would be quite alone!"

"I am quite alone as it is."

"And would your father consent?"

"I think he would. I am a burthen to them now. They cannot feel my grief, nor comfort it, and they don't like the sight of it, though I am sure I trouble them with it as little as possible."

"Dear Cecil!" and the ready tears welled up in Rosamond's grey eyes.

"I don't want to talk of it," said Cecil. "If I felt worthy to grieve it would be less dreadful; but it all seems like hypocrisy. Rosamond, if you were to lose Julius to-morrow, you would not be as unhappy as I am."

"Don't, don't!" cried Rosamond, making a gesture of horror. "But does not coming here make it worse?"

"No, real stabs are better than dull aching; and then you—you, Rosamond, did know how it really was, and that I would—I would——"

Cecil wept now as Rosamond had longed to see her weep when she had left Compton, and Rosamond spoke from her tender heart of comfort; but the outburst did not last long, and Cecil said, recovering herself—

"After all, my most peaceful times of late have been in walking about in those woods at Sirenwood;

I should like to live there. You know *he* always wished it to be the purchase, because it joins Compton, and I should like to get it all into perfect order and beauty, and leave it all to little Raymond."

"I should have thought the place would have been full of ghosts."

"I tried. I made the woman let me in, and I sat where poor Camilla used to talk to me, and I thought I was the better for facing it out. The question is whether Mrs. Poynsett will dislike it. She has a right to be consulted."

Perhaps Cecil could not be gracious. Certainly, Raymond would have been thankful for even this admission.

"You wish me to find out?"

"If you would be so good. I would give it up at once if she has any feeling against it, and go somewhere else—and of course she has! She never can forget what I did!"

Rosamond caressed Cecil with that sweetness which saw everything in the most consoling manner; but when the poor young widow was out of sight, there was a revulsion of feeling.

"No, Mrs. Poynsett must always feel that that wretched marriage broke her son's heart, and murdered him!—murdered him!" said Rosamond to herself, clenching that soft fist of hers. "It ought not to be broached to her!"

But Julius—when she stated it to him rather less

broadly, but still saying that she did not know whether she could bear the sight of Cecil, except when she was before her eyes, and how could his mother endure her at all—did not see it in the same light. He thought Sirenwood gave duties to Cecil, and that she ought not to be hindered from fulfilling them. And he said his mother was a large-minded woman, and not likely to have that personal bitterness towards Cecil that both the ladies seemed to expect, as her rival in her son's affections, and the means of his unhappiness and death.

He was right; Mrs. Poynsett was touched by finding that Cecil clung to them rather than to her sublime family, and especially by the design as to little Raymond, though she said that must never be mentioned; nothing must bind so young a creature as Cecil, who really did not know what love was at all.

"She is afraid the sight of her is distressing to you," said Rosamond.

"Poor child, why should she?" said Mrs. Poynsett. "She was the victim of an unsuccessful experiment of my dear boy's, and the unsuspecting instrument of poor Camilla's vengeance. That is all I see in her."

"Mrs. Poynsett, how can you?" cried Rosamond, impetuously. "With all I know of her sorrow, I rage at her whenever I am out of sight of her."

"I can't do that," said Mrs. Poynsett, half smiling, "any more than I could at a doll. The poor thing was in a false position, and nobody was more sorry for

her than Raymond himself; but you see he had fancied that marriage must bring the one thing it would not in that short time."

"It would, if she had not been a little foolish donkey."

"Or if Camilla Tyrrell had let her alone! It is of no use to rake up these things, my dear Rosamond. Let her come to Sirenwood, and do such good as she can there, if it can comfort her. It was for my sake that the unconscious girl was brought here to have her life spoilt, and I would not stand in the way of what seems to be any relief."

"But is it no pain?" persisted Rosamond.

"No, my dear. I almost wish it was. I shall never get on with her; but I am glad she should come and be near you all; and Miles likes her."

Mr. Charnock demurred at first, and wanted to saddle Cecil with her old governess as a companion, but when he found that Mrs. Poynsett and Miles made no objection, and remembered that she would be under their wing, and would be an inestimable adviser and example to Anne, he consented; and Cecil's arrangements were made with startling rapidity, so that she was in possession before Christmas, which she insisted on spending there. Dunstone had stereotyped hospitalities, which she could not bear, and would not prevent, and now that her first year of widowhood was over, the sorrow was not respected, while it seemed to her more oppressive than ever.

So there she was in vehement activity; restless rather than religious in her beneficence still, though the lesson she had had showed itself in her constantly seeking the advice of Miles, who thought her the most sensible woman in the world, except his Nan. Whether this constant occupation, furnishing, repairing, planning, beautifying her model cottages, her school chapel, and all the rest, were lessening the heartache, no one knew, but the sharp black eyes looked as dry and hard, the lines round the mouth as weary as ever; and Rosamond sometimes thought if Sirenwood were not full of ghosts to her, she was much like a ghost herself who came

> "Hovering around her ancient home,
> To find no refuge there."

There was another who could not help seeing her somewhat in that light, and this was Eleonora Vivian, who had come to Compton to be with Frank, when he was at last able to enjoy a well-earned holiday, and with ears restored to their natural powers, though he always declared that his eight months of deafness had done him more good than anything that had ever befallen him in his life. It had thrown him in on his real self, and broken all the unfortunate associations of his first year in London. His first few months, while he was still in need of care, had been spent with Miles and Anne, and that tender ministry to him which his sister-in-law had begun in his illness had been with him when he was tired, dispirited, or beset

by the trials of a tardy convalescence. As his interpreter, too, and caterer for the pleasures his infirmity allowed, Anne had been educating herself to a degree that "self" improvement never would have induced.

And when left alone in London, he was able to take care of himself in all ways, and had followed the real leadings of his disposition, which his misdirected courtship had interrupted for the time, returning to the intellectual pursuits which were likely to be beneficial, not only as pleasures, but in an economical point of view; and he was half shy, half proud of the profits, such as they were, of a few poems and essays which he certainly had not had it in him to write before the ordeal he had undergone.

Eleonora's elder sister, Mrs. Fanshaw, had come home from India with her husband, newly made a Major-General. Frank had gone to Rockpier early in January, to be introduced to them, and after spending a day or two there, to escort Lena to Compton. Mrs. Poynsett needed but one glance to assure her that the two were happier than their wooing had ever made them before, save in that one brief moment at Cecil's party. Eleonora looked more beautiful, and the look of wistful pain had left her brow, but it had made permanent lines there, as well had seemed likely, and though her laugh would never have the *abandon* of Rosamond's, still it was not so very rare, and though she was still like a beautiful night, it was a bright moonlight one.

A few private interviews made the cause of the change apparent. The sister, Mary Fanshaw, had something of Camilla's dexterity, but having been early married to a good man, she had found its use instead of its abuse; and though Lena's trust had come very slowly, she had given it at last, and saw that her elders could deal with her father as she could never do. Sir Harry respected the General enough to let himself be restrained by him, and the husband and wife were ready to take the charge—removing, however, from Rockpier, for the religious atmosphere of which they were unprepared, and which General Fanshaw thought very dull. Affairs were in course of being wound up on the sale of Sirenwood, and the General had talked to Frank, as one of the family, in a way that had proved to him his own manhood more than anything that had happened to him. Out of the wreck, nothing remained to the old man, and the portion which had been secured by the mother's marriage settlements to younger children, though hitherto out of reach, was felt by the daughters to be due to the creditors, so that only two thousand pounds apiece had been secured to each of them; and this the General consulted Frank about appropriating for Sir Harry's use during his lifetime, himself retaining the management, so as to secure the attendance of the favourite valet, the keeping of a horse, and a fair amount of *menus plaisirs*.

It was also made plain to Frank that Lena's filial

duties and scruples need no longer stand in the way of the marriage. Mrs. Fanshaw had two girls almost come out, and perhaps she did not wish them to be overshadowed by the aunt, who, however retiring, could not help being much more beautiful. So all that remained was that Mrs. Poynsett should be willing to supplement Frank's official income with his future portion. She was all the more rejoiced, as this visit showed her for the first time what Lena really was when brought into the sunshine without dread of what she might hear or see, or of harm being done by her belongings; and her gratitude for the welcome with which she was received was most touching.

The rest of her family were in course of removing to their new home, where Mrs. Fanshaw would be mistress of the house, and so Eleonora's stay at Compton was prolonged till the general migration to London, which was put off till Easter. Just before this, Herbert Bowater came back from Natal, and walked from Strawyers with all his happy dogs, as strong and hearty and as merry as ever; his boyish outlines gone, but wholesome sunburn having taken the place of his rosiness, and his bonny smile with its old joyousness. He had married Jenny and Archie himself, and stayed a month on their ostrich farm, which he declared was a lesson on woman's rights, since Mrs. Ostrich was heedless and indifferent as to her eggs, but was regularly hunted back to the duties by her husband, who always had two wives, and

regularly forced them to take turns in sitting; a system which Herbert observed would be needful if the rights of women were to work. He had brought offerings of eggs and feathers to Lady Rosamond, and pockets full of curiosities for all his village friends; also he had been at the Cape, had seen Glen Fraser, rejoiced the inhabitants with his accounts of Anne, and brought home a delightful budget for her.

But the special cause of his radiance was a letter he brought from his father to Mr. Bindon. The family living, which had decided his own profession, had fallen vacant, and his father, wishing perhaps not to be thought cruel and unnatural by his wife, had made no appointment until Herbert's return, well knowing that he would decide against himself; and feeling that, as things stood, it would be an awkward exercise of patronage to put him in at once. Herbert had declared that nothing would have induced him to accept what he persuaded his father to let him offer to James Bindon, whom he had found to have an old mother in great need of the comfortable home, which, without interest, or any talent save for hard work, he could scarcely hope to secure to her.

"And you, Herbert," said Julius; "can I ask you to come back to me, now that we shall have a fair amount to do between us?"

Herbert smiled and shook his head, as he took out an advertisement for a curate in one of the blackest

parishes of the Black Country. "I've written to answer that," he said.

Julius did not try to hinder him. What had been exaggerated had passed away, and he was now a brave man going forth in his strength and youth to the service he had learnt to understand; able still keenly to enjoy, but only using pleasure as an incidental episode for the delight of others, and as subordinate to the true work of his life.

He asked for his fellow-worker, Mrs. Duncombe. There were tidings, but disappointing ones. She had written a long letter to Julius, full of her reasons for being received into the Roman Communion, where she rapturously declared she had for the first time found peace. Anne and Rosamond took the change most bitterly to heart, but Julius, though believing he could have saved her from the schism, by showing her the true beauty and efficiency of her own Church, could not wonder at this effect of foreign influences on one so recently and imperfectly taught, and whose ardent nature required strong forms of whatever she took up. And the letters she continued to write to Julius were rapturous in the cause of the Pope and as to all that she had once most contemned. She had taken her children with her, but her husband remained tolerant, indifferent, and so probably he would do while his health lasted.

Early in the summer Frank and Eleonora were married, and a pretty little house in the outskirts of

London found for them, suiting with the grace of the one and the poetry of the other. It was a small, quiet household, but could pleasantly receive those literary friends of Frank's whom he delighted to present to his beautiful and appreciative wife, whose sweetness and brightness grew every day under the influence of affection and confidence. The other augury of poor Lady Tyrrell, that their holidays would be spent at Compton Hall, was fulfilled, but very pleasantly for both parties, for it was as much home to Lena as to Frank.

Miles's geniality made all at ease that came near him, and Anne, though never a conversational person, was a quietly kind hostess, much beloved by all who had experienced her gentleness, and she had Frank and Lena to give distinction in their different ways to her London parties, as at Compton, Rosamond never failed to give everything a charm where she assisted in planning or receiving.

Rosamond would never cease to love society. Even had she been a grandmother she would have fired at the notion of a party, enjoy, and render it enjoyable; and the mere announcement of a new face would be as stimulating to her as it was the reverse to Anne. But she had grown into such union with her husband, and had so forgotten the Rathforlane defence, as to learn that it was pleasanter to do as he liked than to try to make him like what she did, and a look of disapproval from him would open her eyes to the flaws in any scheme, however enchanting at first.

She was too necessary an element in all hospitalities of Cecil or of Anne not to get quite as much diversion as so thorough a wife and mother could find time for, since Julia did not remain by any means an only child, and besides her permanent charge of Terence, relays of De Lanceys were constantly casting up at the Rectory for mothering in some form or other.

Cecil depended on her more than on any one else for sympathy, not expressly in feeling, but in all her pursuits. In three years' time Sirenwood was in perfect order, the once desolate garden blazed with ribbons, triangles and pattipans of verbena, scarlet geranium and calceolaria, with intervals of echiverias, pronounced by Tom to be like cabbages trying to turn into copper kettles; her foliage plants got all the prizes at horticultural shows, her poultry were incomparable at their exhibitions, her cottages were models, her school machinery perfect, and if a pattern in farming apparatus were wanted, people went to Mrs. Raymond Poynsett's steward. She had people of note to stay with her every winter, went to London for the season, and was made much of, and all the time she looked as little, and pinched, and weary, and heart-hungered as ever, and never seemed to thaw or warm, clinging to no one but to Miles for counsel, and to Rosamond for the fellow-feeling it was not always easy to give—when it was apparently only about an orchid or a churn—and yet Rosamond tried, for she knew it was starvation for sympathy.

The Charnock world murmured a little when, after a succession of De Lancey visitors for four months, the Rectory was invaded by Rosamond's eldest brother, Lord Ballybrehon, always the most hairbrained of the family, and now invalided home in consequence of a concussion of the brain while pig-sticking in India. He was but a year older than Rosamond, and her favourite of all, whose scrapes she had shared, befriended, defended, and scolded in turn, very handsome, very lazily daring, droll and mischievous, a sort of concentration of all the other De Lanceys. His sister loved him passionately, he fascinated the Rector, and little Julia was the adorer of Uncle Bally.

But Rosamond was rather aghast to find Bally making such love as only an Irishman could do to the prim little widow at Sirenwood, dismayed and a little bit ashamed of her unspoken conviction that Bally, after all his wild freaks and frolics, had come to have an eye to the needs of the Rathforlane property; and what were her feelings when, instead of finding the wild Irishman contemned, she perceived that he was believed in and met fully half way? The stiffness melted, the eyes softened and sparkled, the lips parted in soft agitated smiles, the cheeks learnt to blush, and Cecil was absolutely and thoroughly in love!

Yes, she had found her heart and was won—won in spite of the Dunstone dislike to the beggarly title—in spite of Miles's well-considered cautions—in spite

of all her original self. And if Ballybrehon began from mere desire to try for the well-endowed widow, he had the warm loving nature that was sure to kindle and reciprocate the affection he evoked, enough to make him a kind husband.

And yet, could any one have wished Cecil Poynsett a more trying life than one of her disposition must needs have with impetuous, unpunctual, uncertain, scatter-brained, open-handed Ballybrehon, always in a scramble, always inviting guests upon guests without classification, and never remembering whom he had invited!

Rosamond herself declared she should be either in a rage or worn to fritters by a month of it. How Cecil liked it never appeared. Some thought that they squabbled and worried each other in private. but it is certain, that, as Terry said, Bally had turned the block into living flesh and blood, and Lady Ballybrehon was wondrously livelier, brighter, and sweeter ever since she had been entirely conquered by the tyrant love, and had ceased to be the slave of her own way.

THE END.

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